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CHINESE LITERATURE

QUARTERLY

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AT THE GREAT WALL

Tu Peng-cheng

The following is a chapter from Defence of Yenan, *a first novel by Tu Peng-cheng, which gives not only a graphic account of events, but a vivid depiction of individual participants in this epic struggle of the people's war of liberation.*

Tu Peng-cheng was born in 1921 in the northwestern province of Shensi. He passed his boyhood in extreme poverty. At seventeen, he joined the revolution. He learned to read and write while stationed in Yenan, the political and cultural centre of the liberated areas at that time. From 1947 onwards, he took part in the armed struggle to liberate the Northwest and worked at the same time as a reporter for the Hsinhua News Agency. Inspired by the unaffected modesty and heroism of his comrades-in-arms, he began his novel in 1949. It was completed in 1954 only after repeated revisions.

Further information on this novel and its author can be found in Chinese Literature, *No. 2, 1955.*

I

On the fifth of August 1947 the Northwest Field Army reached the Yulin front. On the sixth at dawn it launched an attack along the entire line from Shenmu on the Tuwei River in the east to Polopao in the west where the Wuting River flows south through the Great Wall. In a day and night of fierce fighting the field army destroyed two regiments and two battalions of the enemy's regular army plus the reactionary armed units of four local counties, then closed in on Yulin from every sector. The siege which followed lasted for two full days.

Our army always attacked at night. During the daylight hours our main forces withdrew, leaving only small units to hold those outskirts that had already been captured and to watch the enemy.

At dawn of the third day when our main forces were pulling back, Chou Ta-yung's First Company was one of the units ordered to hold the line in the western suburbs of Yulin.

Ta-yung crawled to the top of a small hill and examined the surrounding terrain. Not far from him, willow trees had been stripped of their leaves by rifle fire. Birds which had nested in the trees during the night had been pierced by bullets and lay dead on the ground. Artillery shells had uprooted several big trees and flung them down. The previous night's battle had been intense.

When the sun emerged on the horizon, the enemy commenced a heavy barrage. Artillery shells ripped through the air with terrifying screams. They burst in great sheets of flame, churned earth showering from the sky, acrid smoke smarting and blinding.

Ta-yung rolled down the hill, crossed through the pall of smoke and jumped into a trench.

"Get your hand grenades ready, comrades!" he shouted. "The enemy's going to charge!"

Tensely, the fighters made their preparations.

But the attacking party was small and it was quickly thrown back.

Laying down one barrage after the next, the enemy launched a series of attacks, continuously, for six hours, but without the least effect.

That night the PLA (People's Liberation Army) again drove against Yulin. A tornado of rifle and artillery fire fell on the city. KMT (Kuomintang) troops on the city walls yelled in alarm. They soaked wool and cotton bales and quilts with oil, ignited them and dropped them outside the walls. Yulin was surrounded by a ring of flames.

Ta-yung led the men of First Company, carrying scaling ladders, toward the city's big west gate. They had driven to within a hundred yards of the gate when a battalion messenger came crawling through the mud. He tugged Ta-yung by the shirt and said:

"Order from the battalion C.O.: Your company is to withdraw to where it started from."

Covered with mud, his throat parched, Ta-yung was enraged.

"What for?" he rasped.

"How do I know? Anyhow that's the battalion commander's order."

First Company pulled back toward its jumping-off point.

As Ta-yung crept through the mud, shells burst all around him. Earth, branches, stones, rained down on his back. Angrily, he gritted his teeth. The blood raced in his veins. His chest felt as though it was going to burst.

"Withdraw!" he muttered. "What the hell for!"

He could hear peasant stretcher-bearers, crawling behind him, saying:

"Then our army isn't going to take Yulin?"

"Who says so? Keep talking like that and I'll skin you alive!"

A few dark forms crept up beside Ta-yung.

"Company commander, why are we going back? We've got to take that place! We've just got to clean out that nest of traitors!" It was Ma Chuan-yu's voice.

"We'll take Yulin or we'll die trying!" Li Chiang-kuo's belly was full of anger. Ta-yung pounded his fist on the ground.

"What are you bunching together for? Trying to make a target for a shell? We were ordered to withdraw and that's what we're going to do! Go back and look after your men!"

The enemy kept sending up flares which hung in the sky like huge electric bulbs and brightly illuminated our positions outside the city. Taking advantage of the brilliant light, they bombarded us with every weapon in their arsenal. The fire of exploding shells streaked the heavens like lightning.

Ta-yung crept through a paddy field, leaped into a stream, crawled on the ground, jumped up and ran forward, crouching. Dashing a few dozen yards to the left, he bumped into Chang Pei, the battalion's political instructor. Chang Pei turned and said:

"I've just been looking for you. Come on!"

His left hand swathed in bandages, the political instructor was unable to crawl. He bent forward at the waist and virtually flew through the rain of bullets. He splashed across a stream, leaped down an embankment and plunged into a hollow. His movements were so quick and agile, even Ta-yung had difficulty in keeping up with him.

The two men stretched prone, side by side in the hollow.

"Our army's pulling back," said Ta-yung. "Does that mean we're going to launch another attack right away?"

"This wretched place! The mud's enough to soak your belly to a pulp! Ta-yung, our field army's leaving Yulin."

Ta-yung drew a sharp breath. His back arched into a bow, as if he were gathering himself to spring.

"What!" he cried. "The whole army leaving?"

Chang Pei's hand lightly pressed down on Ta-yung's spine. "Don't get excited. Our whole army is pulling out.—Look at those damn flares! We've got to collect our wounded in a hurry.—The enemy is rushing up reinforcements. Their enlarged Thirty-sixth Division is marching on Yulin along both sides of the Great Wall as fast as it can travel. It's only ten miles from here right now. We're pulling out, immediately!"

Ta-yung ground his teeth. "We've been fighting here day and night. We've had losses. You mean to say we're going to let them off so cheap?"

"Nothing cheap about it," Chang Pei retorted. "We're leaving Yulin so that we can hit the enemy even harder."

Soldiers streamed past the two men toward the rear. Some carried heavy machine guns; others bore trench mortars on their backs. They were followed by whinnying mules laden with dismantled mountain guns. Apparently the artillery units were withdrawing.

"The regimental C.O. has ordered our battalion to cover the retreat. Your company is to cover the battalion when the battalion pulls out. After you've finished the job, go to the Great Wall, a mile north of here. A mounted messenger will be waiting for you beneath a big tree. He'll tell you where to go. Don't forget now—keep calm and look sharp as you fall back!"

Ta-yung returned to his company and conferred with political instructor Wang Cheng-teh. They then issued instructions to their platoon and squad leaders.

In a little while, except for the small units covering the withdrawal, the entire Northwest Field Army had vanished without a trace. It was as if it had flown off on one of the desert winds, or suddenly disappeared into the ground.

"Old Wang," said Ta-yung, "it's nearly time for us to get out of here. We have seven wounded, two broken machine guns and a trench mortar. You take the wounded and the damaged weapons and catch up with the army first. After we've buried our dead, we'll follow right behind you."

"Good. We'll move more smoothly that way."

Twenty minutes after the departure of the political instructor, Ta-yung and his men threw back an enemy attack, then marched north a mile to the place the battalion political instructor had indicated—the big tree near the Great Wall.

They could see the flames blazing outside the city walls of Yulin. The enemy was keeping up a heavy fire. Stray bullets whistled overhead.

There was no sign of the messenger from regiment. Then they heard a horse whinny and Ta-yung led his men in the direction of the sound. He turned on his flashlight. The messenger was lying stiffly on the ground, the reins wrapped around his arm, his rifle beside him. He had been killed by a stray bullet. An icy hand seemed to clutch Ta-yung's heart.

The men buried the messenger.

When he was together with the main forces, Ta-yung was calm even when the enemy came swarming toward him by the thousands. Now he felt cold all over. Where had the army gone to?

The earth and sky were black. It was so dark you couldn't see the tip of your nose. Alone by the Great Wall, buffeted by sandy gales—what were they to do? What direction should they take? Had the army withdrawn east along the Great Wall? Why should the army go that way? West along the Wall then? The enemy reinforcements were coming from the west. Perhaps our forces had gone to strike a blow at them. But when political instructor Chang Pei had given Ta-yung his orders he hadn't said a word about attacking the reinforcements! Ta-yung was in a sweat. Who knew how many hardships and dangers lurked in the dark unfathomable night!

He sent a messenger out with the flashlight to search for some of the army's lime markers. No luck—the clean-up units had wiped out every one.

A wild wind sprang up from the desert, driving black clouds across the sky, stinging the faces of the men with sand. Lightning flashed, thunder rocked the heavens. Big drops of rain soon turned into a pouring deluge. Wind, lightning, thunder, rain, raged together in a horrid uproar, enveloping the men with such force that they were unable to move a step. . . .

When the storm abated a bit, Ta-yung led his men northeast along the Great Wall. It was pitch dark. In order not to get lost, groups of three or four men held on to a strip of leg-wrapping. Others tied white handkerchiefs to their knapsacks to serve as markers for the men behind. By the time they had trudged three difficult miles, they were soaked to the skin and spattered all over with mud.

In the flickering lightning, the fighters could see a swath of black stretching before them—a grove of trees. Hey! The men were delighted. Trees usually enclosed a village, with people and firesides. The company drew nearer. Sure enough, a hamlet lay within the grove.

II

Ta-yung led the men toward the hamlet. If they continued wandering around in the dark stormy night, they might very easily lose their way and end up in the desert, or run into the enemy.

Ta-yung went ahead first with a few men to scout. The hamlet contained a few dozen ramshackle houses, all with their doors shut tight. Not a dog barked. There didn't seem to be a breath of life. As a matter of fact, the peasants had blown out their lamps, put their hands over their children's mouths and were standing with their ears glued to the doors and windows, listening. They lived in constant fear in these days of men and horses sweeping back and forth across the countryside, for they never knew when disaster would strike.

After stationing sentries outside the hamlet, Ta-yung brought his men in.

A dilapidated little temple stood in the northwest corner of the hamlet, and it was there that Ta-yung called a meeting of the company's Communist Party committee members, Wang Lao-hu, Li Chiang-kuo, Ma Chang-sheng, Ma Chuan-yu and leader of Platoon Three, Jen Shih-hsing.

Ta-yung wrung the water out of his trouser legs and hat. It was hard for him to speak, he was so upset. He couldn't figure it out. The army had fought for several days and nights. It had taken all the enemy strongpoints outside Yulin. Then, just when the city was going to fall, they were ordered to fall back. What was the sense of that? Suppose

reinforcements *were* coming? Many's the time the PLA besieged a city and beat off enemy reinforcements at the same time. But no, we had to retreat!

Holding his rifle, Lao-hu stood in the rain outside the doorway of the little temple as though he enjoyed nothing better than a good drenching. Chang-sheng squatted in silence against the wall. With a spring Chuan-yu seated himself on a table and drummed his fist on its wooden top. He was a bundle of fire. He needed a battle, tense action, to give vent to his burning energy. Chiang-kuo alternated between toying with his flashlight and taking off his hat and putting it on again. He was very fidgety.

"Lao-hu," he said, "you've always got some tobacco on you. Give me just a speck, for the love of heaven. My throat's itching something fierce."

"Tobacco?" replied Lao-hu. "It's been soaked to a mush, along with everything else I own."

"I've never seen anyone die for want of a smoke," Chuan-yu said to Chiang-kuo. "You can get along without it for a while. Where did you pick up your fancy tastes anyway?"

"All right, all right, so I won't smoke!"

"Chiang-kuo, nobody would ever mistake you for a dumb mute," said Chang-sheng. "Why don't you stop your squawking?"

"Turn it off, why don't you," begged the leader of Platoon Three. "Where do you birds get the energy to do so much arguing? Shut up and give the company commander a chance to speak."

Ta-yung reviewed in his mind everything Chang Pei, the battalion political instructor, had told him about the withdrawal. But he still didn't understand it.

"It doesn't look to me as if our army has gone to fight the enemy reinforcements," he announced finally.

The men were shocked. Chuan-yu leaped down from the table. Chiang-kuo squatted with angry abruptness. Even Lao-hu, famed for his steadiness, took an involuntary step toward his company commander. Heavy-hearted, no one spoke, no one uttered a sound. It was as if everyone had stopped breathing. Outside the wind howled dismally through the swishing rain. Black night wrapped all in its tight embrace.

Then Ta-yung remembered the responsibilities of his position. If he, a leader, acted surly and resentful of orders, what would the men think? Taking a grip on himself, he said:

"Don't lose your heads, comrades!"

"We don't attack Yulin, we don't fight the reinforcements!" exploded Chuan-yu. "It's just . . . ah, what's the use!" He stamped with exasperation.

"That's right," said Chiang-kuo. "Here we don't fight, there we don't fight. All we do is march, march, march!"

KU YUAN: Sweeping Snow

Ta-yung put everything he had into making his words calm and firm.

"We all know our army's strategy. If our leaders say we're moving away to get into a better position to hit the enemy, we must believe it. Our company has to catch up with our main forces. Maybe we'll catch up quickly; maybe we'll have to wander around for quite a while first. Anyhow we can't only look at the bright side. We have to prepare for trouble. To make a long story short, comrades, we've got a thousand catty burden on our shoulders." He thought a moment, then said deliberately: "We've lost contact with our army, but does that scare anyone? As for me, I wouldn't care if the earth sank and the sky collapsed."

Chiang-kuo leaped to his feet. "Who said anything about being scared?" he demanded. "We've never given a snap for all the broken-down devils in the Kuomintang army! What if we have lost contact? There are plenty of roads around here. If we run into the enemy, we just bash them. The day will never dawn when Chiang Kai-shek's clowns can be a match for the likes of us!"

Chuan-yu stood like a rock, his hands on his hips. "I haven't seen any enemy soldiers with three heads and six arms," he remarked. "We've all got heads on our shoulders. We've got two legs to walk with and a gun to shoot. What's there to be afraid of? Let's go. Strike!"

"Strike, strike! Is that all you can think of? You're always banging that anvil," said Chang-sheng. "You must have been a blacksmith!"

The leader of Platoon Three agreed. "Right. We can't march without a direction and we can't strike blindly either."

Holding his rifle, Lao-hu paced to and fro on a short line. At times he patted a foot lightly in one of the puddles on the floor. He was neither as open and buoyant as Chiang-kuo, nor did he get red in the face with excitement like Chang-sheng.

"Chiang-kuo, Chuan-yu," he said, "hasn't this rain been able to damp down those fires you've got in your bellies? Our job is to tell every Party member to get all the men pulling together; come what may, we must catch up with our army. We've got to march and march and march some more! When we run into the enemy, if we can wipe them out, we'll wipe them out. If we can't wipe them out, then we pull up our feet and travel. We're not going to bite off more than we can swallow."

"The good thing is that there aren't many of us," said Ta-yung. "We're hard to spot. We can fight when we please and march when we please. But Lao-hu is right: We mustn't be rash, or we're liable to get our noses put out of joint. And I agree with Chiang-kuo and Chuan-yu on one thing: No matter how rough the going becomes—we'll get through. Comrades, we have to make it plain to the men that there was a good reason for our army's withdrawing. We fight only in those places we want to fight. Any time a battle isn't to our advantage we light out and lead the enemy on a merry chase through the mountains."

"We all understand our tactics, commander," said Chiang-kuo. "But when a fellow runs into an actual situation, he gets so burned up. . . . It isn't always easy to be reasonable—"

"Put a lid on it!" Chuan-yu interrupted. "You've made your point; don't keep babbling."

"It's up to us Party members to do a good job," said Lao-hu. "Li Yu-ming, that new soldier assigned to our company three days ago, hasn't let up with his crying and snivelling. We don't know whether he's scared or what. He won't say a word. You'd think he'd swallowed his tongue."

"Li Yu-ming?" said the leader of Platoon Three. "He's one of those who joined up from the Border Region militia. He's never been in any battles before. He's still a little timid."

The meeting concluded, Ta-yung and the others returned to the centre of the hamlet.

Thunder boomed and rolled. Rain fell heavier than ever, running from the men's heads down their necks, plastering their drenched clothes to their bodies. In the flashes of lightning Ta-yung could see the men, holding their rifles, in groups of four and five, sitting back to back in the mud. They were fast asleep. Squad and platoon leaders patrolled beside them; a few stood snoring with their backs against the wall.

A few minutes later Chiang-kuo came running up to Ta-yung. "Commander, there's hope!" he shouted. "I've found an old peasant who served as a guide for our army. He's just come back."

After questioning the old man carefully and learning which direction the army took, Ta-yung gave the command:

"Fall in!"

The soldiers formed their ranks in the mud.

"Comrades, it's been hard sitting in this muddy soup," he said. "But we can't trouble the local people no matter how uncomfortable we get. We're going to march now. Anyone who's hungry can eat some of his flour ration. If you're thirsty, there's rain water at the sides of the road."

"Do we eat first?" a soldier asked.

"No. Eat on the march."

"Our flour's all turned to paste," said another soldier.

"That's easier to swallow than dry flour."

Ta-yung led the company tramping through the mud toward the southeast. After marching about two miles, they heard firing and, an instant later, galloping hoofbeats approaching. At Ta-yung's order, the men stopped the horses as they came down the road. The riders turned out to be scouts of the "Fearless Division."

"What outfit are you from?" one of the scouts asked Ta-yung. "Oh, 'The Heroes Division.' Turn south and head for our liberated area, fast!

The enemy's moving down this way. It'll be daylight in another hour. Comrade, we've got things to do. We have to be going."

The horses clattered off at a run toward the east.

From the northwest, accompanied by savage firing, enemy troops rolled down in a mad surge. What unit was this, Ta-yung wondered, that acted so fierce? It would be foolhardy to try and withstand them all with only one company. He led his men southeast, on the double. An enemy unit fanned out to surround them, yelling wildly, flinging hand grenades. . . .

The sixty-odd men of the company fought a withdrawing action. . . .

Although the company managed to break out of the encirclement, it had lost precious time. Near daybreak, the enemy was still hot on the company's tail, laying down a heavy artillery barrage to cut off its retreat.

"Come on, you bastards!" Ta-yung raged at the approaching enemy. "Even if you were all mouth you couldn't eat any real men!"

III

In battle the situation is constantly changing.

At dawn, Ta-yung and his men had no sooner beaten off an attack of the enemy's advance unit than they heard firing to their rear. They turned around to see thousands of tracer bullets streaming toward them. The enemy had knifed in only a hundred yards behind. They could see the enemy soldiers clearly.

The realization that they were cut off came to Ta-yung as a shock. He knew that the enemy was using this tactic to paralyze their judgment and their will. At that moment he seemed to see Chao Ching, the regimental commander, at his side, saying:

"The men are listening to your voice, they're watching your every move, your every facial expression. Courage and calm now are the greatest asset, the greatest wisdom."

His mind racing, Ta-yung looked at the men. If a single one of them broke and ran, he'd be selling out his comrades' chances of victory. But not a man wavered. Hugging the ground, the men fired steadily. Ta-yung felt with such strength at his command, the company was invincible.

The men were brave, but in a tight spot they needed a leader who could give cool orders in a clear determined voice.

After leading the men to take several positions of higher ground, Ta-yung called to them:

"I'm over here!" He pointed at the ground beneath him as if to say, "And I'm here to stay!"

"We'll fight it out from here. The time has come to prove your mettle!"

Ta-yung's decisive tone called forth all the men's military skill, their sense of discipline, their hatred of the ruling class oppressors.

"Pour it into them! Mow them down!" shouted the fighters.

Their bold cries stirred Ta-yung. Their courage further bolstered his own. He felt big, powerful. Pushing his hat to the back of his head and opening his tunic, he raised his pistol. He was like an iron image with blazing eyes.

Looking at him, the men were inspired.

Ta-yung and the fighters were consumed with hatred for the enemy. Their only thought was to keep pumping lead into their attackers.

Shortly before the sun emerged, three American-made enemy planes flew over. They bombed and strafed in wailing power dives. Skimming the treetops, they flew so low they stirred the wet gravel particles on the ground.

Enemy artillery poured tons of steel on the heads of Ta-yung and his men. Shells of every description split the air and burst, flinging up showers of earth, stones and steel splinters. Black columns of smoke rose into the sky. Rifle bullets whizzed through the air and bit into the ground on all sides of the men, ploughing up little flowers of earth. The ground was like a bubbling cauldron, contracting and trembling beneath the fighters' chests. At times it tossed like a ship on a stormy sea.

It was a life and death struggle, obliterating all ordinary thoughts and emotions. The thinking of Ta-yung had become simple: They would have to fight with all their might if they wanted to survive.

Ta-yung ran to a large tree and swept his eyes across the surrounding terrain. There was at least a regiment of enemy soldiers in front of them; behind, over a battalion. Pistol in hand, he braved the heavy shellfire to inspect his platoons. The one under Chang-sheng, he ordered to remain with him. He instructed Chiang-kuo to take thirty men and occupy the high ground directly ahead. They were to hold off the enemy and not give an inch. He directed Lao-hu to take two squads and cut a path through the enemy troops in the rear.

His left knee on the ground, holding his rifle in his left hand, Lao-hu leaned back and brought his right hand sweeping forward. "Come on!" he yelled to his squads. The men charged at the enemy.

Ta-yung ran to the highest point of the company's position. He found Chiang-kuo shouting orders, firing, standing like a big iron wall. Chiang-kuo's cotton-padded jacket was open; sweat poured down his brick-red face. No enemy could get off cheap in a clash with a man like Chiang-kuo, thought Ta-yung. He felt a contempt for their opponents.

"How's it going?" he asked.

Chiang-kuo's bold eyes gleamed straight at the enemy. Without turning his head, he replied:

"We're giving them a bellyful! We've knocked back two of their charges."

Rifle grenades exploded overhead in puffs of black smoke which changed in an instant to sheets of fire.

Ta-yung threw himself down and embraced the ground with both hands. Raising his head, he saw that Chiang-kuo had sent one squad under Chuan-yu out on the left flank, where it was holding a small temple. Two combat teams led by acting squad leader Yu-ming had occupied a piece of cemetery ground. Chiang-kuo deploys his men well, thought Ta-yung, but he shouted:

"What's the good of sticking around here, Chiang-kuo? How about a short fast jab at the enemy?"

Chiang-kuo savagely ripped off his hat and wiped his streaming face with it.

"We'll slug 'em the minute the chance comes!"

The men had been concentrating on the enemy when the shouting back and forth between Ta-yung and Chiang-kuo brought to their attention the fact that their commander was with them. His presence gave them a great lift. They cast pleased glances at one another.

Ta-yung could see that they were covered with mud, their faces grimed by smoke. Blood and mud were mixed on the backs and shoulders of some, but none of them stopped firing.

Though a man's heart beats fast as he approaches a dangerous situation, when he is actually in the midst of it, all his thoughts become concentrated and simple. He doesn't consider whether he will live or die. So it was with Ta-yung and his men.

"Comrades," cried Ta-yung, "show them your style with your bayonets!"

"We'll take care of the enemy good and proper, commander!"

"We'll make them sorry they were ever born!"

After a heavy artillery barrage, between two and three hundred enemy troops came charging at Chiang-kuo's position. Chiang-kuo waited till the attackers were only forty yards away, then he yelled:

"Fire!"

The fighters flung their hand grenades and a curtain of smoke spurted heavenwards. Enemy soldiers rolled and crawled hastily away. Many remained motionless where they had fallen.

Before Chiang-kuo could climb out of his fox-hole, Ta-yung had already leaped forward, shouting at the top of his voice:

"Heroes, charge!"

Like a clap of thunder on a clear day, his cry shattered the enemy's nerve. But it galvanized the PLA fighters into action. They tore out of the trenches. In the smoke and dust, men shouted, bayonets flashed. . . . The dozen-odd men seemed to have the drive of thousands—all concentrated on that one small battlefield.

The enemy soldiers scattered in panic. Not even the machine guns which their officers turned on them could halt their flight. . . .

Finally, they were rounded up again and, under the menace of their own machine guns, thrown against Chiang-kuo's right flank. Two combat teams held off hundreds of the enemy.

"Take over here, commander," Chiang-kuo pleaded. "I'll take a squad to reinforce them!"

Ta-yung stopped him. "I'll go!" he said. Not giving Chiang-kuo any chance to argue, he signalled to a dozen fighters behind him.

"Come with me!"

Ning Chin-shan's face had suffered a bad scrape, but, brandishing a hand grenade, he clambered out of the trench with the rest. Seeing his waxen bloodless face, Ta-yung said:

"You can't go. Better rest a while."

"I came here to fight, commander!"

At first Ta-yung was going to order him to stay behind, but then he thought: It's only because of stubborn courage like Chin-shan's that our few dozen men can fight off two thousand enemy troops. At a time like this when we're so few, who can rest? He let Chin-shan come along.

By the time they reached the right flank, the enemy had already broken into the position. Yu-ming and his six or seven men were fighting hand to hand, their bayonets stabbing, slashing. . . .

Running up with his fighters, Ta-yung shouted:

"Communists, warriors of the revolution—charge!"

The sound of their commander's voice gave the defenders new strength. They quickly repulsed the enemy.

Five minutes later, the enemy began an artillery barrage. Shells burst, branches were snapped from the trees. Several big boulders were shattered into fragments. A large tree was ripped up by the roots and flung to the ground. Earth, shell splinters, pieces of rock, rained down on the heads of the fighters.

But the enemy had been driven back and, for the moment at least, we were victorious. The defenders of the right flank greeted Ta-yung happily.

"Pretty dangerous then!" said one.

"Dangerous?" scoffed another. "We gave the danger back to the enemy on the points of our bayonets!"

Ta-yung loved to listen to the men's bold talk. He felt that he was nothing without them. With them, he could move mountains. His hands gripping the earthwork mound, Ta-yung peered intently at the enemy positions. To the fighters, his eyes seemed to be flashing daggers, daggers on which the enemy would spit themselves if they charged again.

The commander was the hope and faith of the men.

Ta-yung walked through the shallow trench the fighters had dug. Some of the men were boasting, some were telling rambling jokes, a few were patching study exercise books that had been damaged in the recent clash. One man was carefully repairing his fountain pen while relating

its history to a companion and expounding on his own skill as penman. A number of soldiers were bickering over the sharing of a precious cigarette butt.

"It's a nice long one. Every man should be able to get one drag out of it. No grabbing allowed!"

"Comrades, the day I become manager of a big cigarette company, you can all come and smoke all you want, free of charge!"

"Good. We'll hold you to that. No going back on your word now!"

The men's cheerful banter relaxed Ta-yung and steadied him. Our political commissar is right, he thought. The will power of one proletarian fighter has got more punch than a whole American-mechanized enemy division. No truer words were ever spoken. . . .

Further down the trench, he came upon Yu-ming bandaging a soldier's wound. Here's a fellow who was all thumbs when he came to us from the militia a few days ago, mused Ta-yung. His first time in battle at Yulin, he crawled with his arms wrapped around his head and his backside sticking up in the air—scared to death. When we charged he threw his hand grenades with the safety covers still on. But just look at him today—steady, competent. How quickly battle matures a man!

A messenger, sweating profusely, ran up to Ta-yung and reported.

"Lao-hu says: Tell the commander to please pull out with the men at once!"

Ta-yung drew back both his flanks and assembled them at the central high position which Chiang-kuo was holding.

"Comrades," he called, "those carrying wounded go first. Communists cover the rear. We're going to dash out in one rush. No one is to fall behind!"

Chiang-kuo stepped forward. "You and the others go ahead, commander. With two squads I can cover you."

Ta-yung gripped his hand tightly. "Right. Everything depends on you."

"I wouldn't offer to take the job if I wasn't sure I could do it."

"Good. Hold out for ten minutes or so, then follow after us."

It was noon and the deep yellow sun hung directly overhead. Clouds moved rapidly across the sky. Steamy vapor rose from the earth.

Ta-yung led his men to the southwest where Lao-hu had broken an opening in the enemy line. The enemy was pushing hard from both sides to close the gap. . . . A moment later they did so; but before they could set themselves, Ta-yung flung his forces at them in a bayonet charge. Yelling, throwing hand grenades, the fighters charged against the confused enemy—and smashed through!

Chiang-kuo followed with his squads very soon after.

Although they had escaped the enemy encirclement, it was clear to Ta-yung that shaking off the enemy on the open plain in broad daylight

was going to be difficult. Quickly, he led his men to a village. Here, he thought, they could gain time, and hold out until dark.

To hold out until dark would mean victory.

IV

Cartridge cases, Kuomintang soldiers' torn shoes and discarded old uniforms, cotton wadding, chicken feathers, dead draught animals . . . cluttered the streets of the village. Some houses were still burning. . . . The village was completely deserted.

The PLA men looked for drinking water, but there wasn't a drop to be found anywhere. The enemy had already been through this village. After drinking it dry, they had smashed all the water jugs. The underground cistern they had contaminated by throwing in a dozen of their dead. The PLA men had been fighting since dawn—over ten hours. They had eaten nothing and their stomachs were burning with hunger. Thirst parched their throats.

Sitting on the steps of houses along the street, they brought out their ration bags and ate the dry flour, a handful at a time. The powdery white flour sprinkled their faces and the front of their uniforms. Someone made a weak attempt at a joke.

"A little more powder and we'll be ready for a *yangko* dance!"

As soon as the company entered the village, Ta-yung took Lao-hu and Chiang-kuo to reconnoitre. Originally inhabited by about thirty families, the village was surrounded by a mound wall twelve feet high. A hundred yards to the north was a gully running east and west. East of the village was an open plain. A small temple stood fifty yards to the southwest. On the right side of the temple was a sand dune.

Ta-yung sent Chiang-kuo with a machine gun and a squad of men to hold the sand dune and the temple. With the remaining men, he and Lao-hu prepared to defend the village proper.

Feverishly the fighters set up rifle positions, dug trenches and foxholes.

Ta-yung climbed the village wall and looked around. From the east, west and south, about two regiments of enemy soldiers were advancing toward the village. With large and small artillery pieces, they poured tons of steel on the defending company. American-made planes bombed and strafed. In the village, houses collapsed, burst into flames. Shells flung up showers of scorched earth. The air was acrid with the smell of powder and thick dust.

After this blind barrage, the enemy attacked twice. Each time the PLA company threw them back. Then, driven by their own machine guns, enemy troops, in whole companies, in whole battalions, launched one charge after the next.

Ta-yung stood in the front line with his fighters. A great tide of strength rose within him. His face was as black as the bottom of a pot, his body was covered with mud, but his eyes flashed fire. Bullets whistled by very close; he never even lowered his head. His ears were ringing so with exploding shells that he couldn't hear the bullets. Suddenly, five or six heavy shells struck a section of the village wall and blew it over, the blast flinging Ta-yung down and burying him in the earth. A moment later, he climbed out.

"Comrades! Communists!" he shouted. "Hit 'em hard!"

Fighters stood up and threw their hand grenades. Some leaped out of the trenches with tommy guns spitting at the enemy.

"Don't give an inch! Wipe 'em out!" Every one of Ta-yung's thoughts and emotions were centered on this one point. Any consciousness of danger had been swept away.

The men holding the little temple southwest of the village were battling fiercely. Their bayonets gleamed in the sun, their bodies outlined against the flashes of exploding shells. . . .

From the temple dashed the young messenger, Little Cheng. Gasping for breath, he ran up to Ta-yung.

"Commander, the enemy's broken into our temple position. The position . . . platoon leader Chiang-kuo says . . . he says—"

Ta-yung whirled around and gripped the youngster by the arm. "What are you so excited about?" he demanded roughly. "What does Chiang-kuo say? Does he want reinforcements?"

"No. No. Platoon leader Chiang-kuo says: Tell the company commander not to worry. He can throw back the enemy. He can hold the position. He says they'll take it only over his dead body!"

"Tell him to hold out one more hour," instructed Ta-yung.

With twelve men, Chiang-kuo successfully withstood six charges by over two hundred enemy troops.

Having suffered heavy losses, the enemy became crafty. They no longer made blind frontal assaults. Before launching their seventh attack on Chiang-kuo's position, they first demolished the temple with artillery fire. They ripped off the roof, then pounded the walls until there were only saw-tooth remains. The air was filled with flying masonry and shell splinters.

Chiang-kuo's face was filthy, dripping sweat. Blood trickled from a cut lip. The danger of having his life snuffed out at any moment made his brain seethe. He wanted to sing, to yell, to swear; he couldn't control his excitement. But when he looked at his men, all thought of personal safety vanished.

They need my support; they're depending on me. The realization gave him strength. He felt big and stalwart. His movements became agile, competent. His face was grim.

"Comrades," he called, "this is test of the stuff we're made of!"

He and his men piled the scattered bricks into a wall. The enemy blew them down again. Once more they piled the bricks. Again the bricks were blasted. Pile them up. Artillery shells threw brick fragments flying in all directions. Three or four men's heads were cut. The blast of exploding shells knocked Chiang-kuo down several times. The temple's wooden beams were on fire. Standing amid the thick smoke and flames, the fighters battled fiercely.

"Use whatever you've got—grenades, bayonets, bricks—anything that's a weapon," Chiang-kuo yelled. "As long as we've a man left we'll hold this position!"

The intensity of the struggle had driven from the men's minds any thought of danger. Hatred and a determination to wipe out the enemy were the only things they were conscious of.

They had run out of rifle bullets. "Let me go and get some from the company commander," one of the men suggested.

"The C.O. can't lay them the way a chicken lays eggs!" Chiang-kuo snapped.

"But without bullets—"

"Without bullets we'll fight anyway!"

At that moment, over a hundred enemy troops came surging toward the entrance of the temple. Chiang-kuo could feel the fighters looking at him.

"Let's go!" he shouted. Like a gust of hot wind he led the charge, plunging into the enemy ranks, smashing with his rifle butt, stabbing with his bayonet. . . . The enemy soldiers ran for their lives, colliding with each other in panic. Chiang-kuo grabbed one of them and dragged him back to the temple. With the prisoner's bullets he brought his rifle back into action.

Chiang-kuo and his men were ordered to return to the village.

The sun seemed to have been nailed in the western sky. Every minute dragged interminably!

Step by step, the enemy pressed closer. They were almost at the east wall of the village.

Lao-hu and seven or eight men were firing at them from behind a low wall near the left end of the eastern sector.

Lao-hu shot slowly and methodically, never wasting a round. Every time his rifle barked an enemy soldier went down. He counted: "One, a brace, a brace and a half, two brace . . . a half dozen. . . ."

After firing three or four shots from one place, he would quickly move to another position. The hearts of the men under Lao-hu beat very evenly. They all fought in the same manner as he. . . .

While the men were concentrating on the enemy troops attacking from the east, another detachment of enemy soldiers swarmed over the west wall. With eleven men, Chang-sheng tried to stem the breakthrough, but it was too late. A whole battalion came pouring in. . . .

Enemy soldiers soon occupied one half of the village. Flames and black smoke covered the sky.

The changing tides of battle were reflected on the face of Ta-yung. Red one moment, black the next; now anxious, now savage. He had fought in a hundred battles and couldn't believe that he and his men would die in this village in spite of their heroic defence. He had been in much tighter spots before, when the situation had looked hopeless, yet he had managed to win out. Bah, what was so dangerous about this!

This attitude was highly effective. It made him completely unconcerned to danger. He thought only of the key problem—to hold out until dark.

The PLA fighters gave ground slowly, moving back compound by compound, defending every building, every wall, with their sweat and blood, stubbornly, courageously. . . .

But at last they were compressed into an area of four compounds at the southern end of the village.

When they suffered set-backs in battle or had heavy casualties, Ta-yung always became furious, and often threw himself at the enemy in a blind rage. Now his blood was boiling, but he held himself in check and remained calm with the greatest effort. The more critical the situation grew, the clearer and more sober he became.

Carefully, he examined their surroundings. Only a few walls separated them from the enemy. The compounds were all walls and corners, so there was not too much danger from bullets or shells. But enemy hand grenades were dropping in like hailstones and bursting with thunderous explosions.

Ta-yung dashed from one compound to another. He wanted the groups defending every sector to feel he was with them. The men were steady. He offered them simple words of encouragement.

Confident, the fighters only wanted to keep firing. They had made a breach in the wall of an adjoining compound and through this opening Ta-yung went to see how Chuan-yu and his men were getting on.

The adjoining compound was thick with smoke. The roofs of the houses and several of the walls had collapsed. Flames were crackling in the fallen beams and rafters.

Here the machine gun had been fired till it was red hot, and the men were smearing it with wet mud to cool it off. A moment later it began firing again. Some of the men, bleeding from the nose and ears, had fainted from shell concussion. But as soon as they revived, they continued fighting. When a man went down, another comrade was there immediately to take his place. Men covered with blood refused to admit they were hit. A few, severely wounded, could no longer fight, but they still had mouths, and they cheered on their companions. Some wrested enemy machine guns and turned them against the attackers. Taking

advantage of the slightest enemy weakness, bravely the fighters charged, blasted, slashed, shouted. . . .

"We're the guard of the Party's Central Committee!"

"At them, comrades!"

"Shake 'em up with your grenades!"

Slowly, night was falling.

From four sides the enemy launched an all-out attack. The fighters were in a sea of smoke and flames. Their lips were scorched, their ears deafened, their eyes bloodshot. But the heart of every man pounded with a powerful beat. The men shouted encouragement to one another.

"For the working people—fight it out to the end!"

Ta-yung ran from compound to compound. Wherever the fighting was fiercest, there his firm voice could be heard. His emotion-charged commands shook the fighters like thunder. Sometimes he was swallowed up by the flames, only to reappear an instant later. Even the men who knew him so well felt there was something miraculous about him today!

He dashed to a compound on the left, held by Chang-sheng and four other men. They were firing from behind a pile of enemy bodies.

Firelight flickered on Chang-sheng's face. His old uniform, now smeared with grime, stretched tightly across his broad back. He was firing a machine gun to which another fighter was feeding a belt of ammunition. His movements were unflurried, matter-of-fact. Beside the machine gun, laid out before him ready for use was a tommy gun, a rifle with fixed bayonet, rifle grenades, hand grenades, and a captured American trench mortar.

Crouching, Ta-yung suddenly plopped himself before Chang-sheng.

"How's it going?"

Chang-sheng wiped the sweat on his forehead with the back of his hand. "All right," he replied, without turning his head.

"Their charges been pretty fierce?"

"Fierce?" Chang-sheng spat contemptuously. "Those bastards don't bother us!"

Ta-yung knelt with one knee on the ground. Half a foot above his head, enemy bullets were knocking chips off the top of the brick wall. But Chang-sheng was sprawled across it, firing with the machine gun against his shoulder. He kept spitting earth and dust.

"Keep your body down more," shouted Ta-yung.

"I will when it's necessary!" replied Chang-sheng thickly.

Chang-sheng's air, the tone of his voice stirred in Ta-yung a feeling of solemn joy. Again he thought—The enemy wipe out fighters like these? Not in million years!

Turning the machine gun over to his ammunition man, Chang-sheng said, "As soon as one shows his head, let him have it. Fire in short bursts." His stubborn drawl had an iron strength in it.

"Right. When one shows, I knock one down. When two show, I get the pair!" said the fighter.

The bodies of several enemy soldiers who had managed to come over the wall in the last charge lay about in grotesque poses. Chang-sheng, with no apparent effort, picked them up one by one and tossed them back over the wall. Then he took a cigarette butt from a mound beside the wall and squatted down next to Ta-yung.

"Light up, commander," he invited. "Nothing like a cigarette." After a pause, he continued, "With two catties of tobacco, I could hold this place for a week." His attempt at a joke fell rather flat.

Ta-yung loved Chang-sheng's direct, mulish disposition. He accepted the cigarette and lit it. It was only then that he noticed he was breathing hard and his hands were shaking. Taking a hard draw on the cigarette, he handed it to Chang-sheng.

"Commander . . . " Chang-sheng started to say. Then his eyes swung to the wall. He could sense that the enemy was making another charge. Jumping to his feet, he roared:

"Give it to 'em!" He threw a hand grenade, pushed aside the man at the machine gun, took it over and continued firing, his body shaking with the gun's vibrations, his broad, thick back drenched with sweat.

Enemy soldiers rushed toward them, yelling, howling. . . .

The flames of battle and wild emotions gripped Ta-yung. Time and again he ran forward at the head of his men, and time and again they shielded him with their own bodies. Ta-yung, Chang-sheng, the PLA fighters, hit the enemy with ammunition cases, rocks, broken rifles . . . anything they could lay their hands on. An enemy grenade dropped rolling at Ta-yung's feet. It was going to explode in a second. He quickly kicked it twelve feet away, where it blew up. Four more grenades fell before him. Chao Wan-sheng, a fighter who had been wounded in three places, rushed forward, pushed Ta-yung to one side and snatched one of the grenades to throw back at the enemy. It exploded in his hand. His face streaming blood, he fell to the ground. . . .

Ta-yung grabbed his benefactor, intending to carry him back to the shelter of the low wall. Wan-sheng butted Ta-yung away with his head.

"You go on leading us, commander. Don't bother about me. I brought down plenty of 'em. Even if I die, I've made 'em pay!"

Wan-sheng's clothing was dyed in blood. Of his face, only blood and grime could be seen. Even as he fainted, he was shouting:

"Hit 'em! Fight to the end!"

It was no longer a question of Ta-yung commanding the defence, or of Chang-sheng. Every man with a breath of life was fighting on his own initiative.

The situation went from bad to worse. Enemy artillery pounded the walls of the compounds and houses to dust. They rained incendiary

bombs on the men in the compounds. The ground was ablaze; the very air seemed to be consumed with fire.

V

Every step left a sweat-soaked imprint; every inch of ground was covered with blood. At ten at night the cruel battle still raged.

Ta-yung ordered the men to bury their dead companions. The weapons of their fallen comrades they burned together with the arms they had captured from the enemy.

They had seen too much blood flow. Blood no longer moved them!

They had seen too much sudden death. They were no longer stricken by tragedy!

There was only one thought in their minds: Fight! Avenge!

"Comrades," Ta-yung said to them in a low voice, "we've got to smash our way out. Comrades, there are working people's hearts in our bodies; in our hands we have weapons. With these hearts and these weapons, no enemy can stop us!"

He counted their ranks. Aside from seven wounded, only forty-five men remained of the company. He chose a dozen men to carry the wounded on their backs. The company prepared to set out.

Wan-sheng, heavily wounded, said, "I don't want to slow the comrades down. Leave me here, commander. I . . . I . . . I'll cover you as you pull out!"

Ta-yung stamped with exasperation. "Wan-sheng, you're a Communist. You have no right—"

Wan-sheng crawled forward. "I'm finished, commander. My blood's almost gone. You fellows get out of here!—Comrades, I ask nothing better than to die before your eyes. Let me give the last of my strength. Go on, go, comrades, go and fight! . . ."

"Chin-shan," Ta-yung called implacably. "Carry him with us!"

As Chin-shan bent to lift the wounded man, about twenty enemy troops came charging through a wrecked house on the left flank. Wan-sheng suddenly rose to his knees and flung Chin-shan down.

"Get out of here!" he yelled.

Before Chin-shan could regain his feet, Wan-sheng was already rapidly crawling towards the enemy. In an instant, twenty enemy bayonets were converging on him.

"Come on!" he shouted, and set off the handful of grenades he was clutching to his chest. In their blinding flash, Wan-sheng and half a dozen of the enemy fell together.

Chin-shan threw himself on Ta-yung and wept.

Ta-yung was shivering from head to foot. He felt as if a piece of living flesh had been ripped from his heart.

"Wan-sheng!" he cried with trembling lips.

Huddled close together, the men were silent. With dry, parched throats, their ears ringing, each mechanically continued to do what was necessary.

Furious, Ta-yung stamped his foot. He ordered the men to throw their grenades, then hissed in a voice that came through clenched teeth:

"Come with me!"

He led them in a running battle. When he gave the command, they threw grenades. Courageously, they hacked a bloody path and fought their way through the thick smoke and flames. Bullets whistled from all sides. The enemy hung on tenaciously.

Lao-hu was to cover the withdrawal with a platoon.

Light from the big fires shone on the faces of the men. Ta-yung and Lao-hu looked at each other, eye to eye, for several seconds. Ta-yung wanted to thank him but he didn't know how—Lao-hu never gave danger a second thought. Gripping Lao-hu tightly by the shoulder, he said:

"It's hard to be a hero when the situation is bad, Lao-hu!"

"Get away from here, fast, commander," said Lao-hu. "The enemy's got two legs and so have we. They carry rifles, but these things we've got in our hands aren't just sticks to beat a dog with. Don't worry about us. Anything they can give out, we can take!"

After giving Lao-hu detailed instructions, Ta-yung led his men away.

With fourteen fighters, Lao-hu held off over a thousand onrushing enemy and beat back three waves of attacks. The enemy then deluged them with mortar and heavy artillery shells. Their position became a sheet of flame.

Step by step, the enemy pressed closer. Firing as they went, Lao-hu and his men fell back toward the northwest.

Calm and efficient, Lao-hu moved nimbly. He never shouted and his commands were brief.

Behind the shelter of a long mound, Chin-shan crawled up to him and pulled him to one side.

"The company's gone toward the southeast," said Chin-shan. "Why are you taking us northwest?" His voice trembled. "You're going in the wrong direction!"

"I'm not blind. But I still want to go northwest."

"Why? But why?"

Lao-hu looked in the direction Ta-yung and the troops had taken. "Why?" he drawled. "I want to pull the enemy after us so that the commander can get out of here safely. We have to buy our comrades some time."

"That means we're in for it. That means we'll never . . . we'll never get back. . . ."

"It's true we may be killed, but we'll be saving the commander and the rest of the comrades. Don't feel badly . . . who doesn't want to

live to see victory? But how can there be any victory if we're not willing to lay down our lives for our comrades? Don't take it too hard. . . ."

Suppressing his emotions, Lao-hu struggled to regain his usual calm. He knew from long experience that steadiness now was the expression of all loyalty, courage and wisdom. Danger had simply to be ignored.

He looked at Chin-shan in the light of the flames. The young soldier was rubbing his eyes with his sleeve.

Lao-hu wiped the sweat from his forehead with the back of his hand. "A fighter who snivels and weeps? This place is damp enough without your tears!" he teased. "Don't be afraid. I'm sticking right with you. We'll stay together, Chin-shan. Aha, here come the enemy again!"

The battle raged far into the night. Lao-hu had only nine men left. Their ammunition was almost gone. Again the enemy attacked—this time from four sides.

This is it, thought Lao-hu. Either the fish break the net or they die! He led his men in a bayonet charge to meet the oncoming enemy. White blades clashed in mortal combat.

Ordinarily, Lao-hu gave the impression of being stolid and rather clumsy. But now his movements were sharply agile. Like a whirlwind, he killed two of the enemy in an instant. Then something hit him, and he fell. He knew he was wounded but he didn't know where, nor did he care. Rising to a kneeling position, he threw his last four grenades. Then, mustering all his strength, he stood up and plunged into the smoke, slashing left and right with his bayonet, boldly lunging at the craven enemy.

His wild dash carried him up to a flame-spitting machine gun, terrifying the two enemy soldiers manning the gun so that they turned to flee. With one kick he knocked the gun over, dispatched one man with his bayonet, brought the other one down with his rifle butt. Threatening his frightened soldiers with a revolver, an enemy officer herded a dozen of them to surround Lao-hu. The PLA man had no more grenades or bullets. He faced a circle of bayonet points. With all the hatred that was in him, he whirled around, stabbed and hacked savagely. The enemy soldiers were afraid to come too close. They didn't dare shoot or use their grenades for fear of hitting one of their own men; any soldier Lao-hu pointed his bayonet at hastily drew back. The officer swore and fired his pistol into the air, but to no avail. His men didn't dare to close in. And so Lao-hu held the enemy at bay for more than ten minutes.

He stood with his left leg flexed, his right leg straight, both hands gripping the rifle, its butt beneath his armpit. He stood like a man of iron.

During those ten minutes, Lao-hu was brimming with vitality. In his heart swelled an emotion he had never experienced before—an enormous pride.

For the first time he felt that he was hero, a dashing fellow who towered high above the enemy soldiers surrounding him.

He never moved his head but his eyes darted from left to right. I've got to get at least two more of those swine! he thought. Sweeping aside an enemy soldier's bayonet, he plunged his blade into the man's neck. While the others stood petrified at his sudden move, he ran a second man through. The third man he attacked parried several of his lunges, but finally was pinned dead to the ground. Lao-hu pulled back his rifle—and it came away without the blade! An enemy soldier lunged at his back. Lao-hu dodged and the bayonet missed him. Seizing his rifle by the barrel, Lao-hu smashed the butt against the man's head and knocked his brains out. Hastily he snatched up his bayonet and again affixed it to his gun. Another group of enemy soldiers rushed toward him, the man in the lead with a levelled bayonet. Lao-hu ran to meet him and made a feint at his chest. The man parried the empty air. Before he could recover, Lao-hu ran him through the stomach, then punctured the arm of another enemy soldier who was turning away. The rest fled in panic.

To the west Lao-hu heard wild cries, and he raced in their direction. In the light of an enemy flare he could see Chin-shan in a bitter bayonet duel with an enemy soldier. Chin-shan was exhausted. He obviously couldn't hold out much longer. Lao-hu drove his bayonet into the back of Chin-shan's assailant and brought him kicking to the ground. By then, five enemy soldiers were charging Lao-hu from behind. He turned to see one of them rushing at him, full tilt, with a levelled bayonet. Lao-hu twisted out of the way, then struck back with a savage thrust of his blade. But the fellow dodged and Lao-hu stumbled past him and fell at the foot of a mound, smashing his rifle as he collided heavily with the ground. Another man leaped down from the top of the mound and thrust his bayonet at Lao-hu's chest. Lao-hu grasped the blade with all his strength and stopped it. As the enemy yanked back for another lunge, the edges of the bayonet carved deep cuts in the palms of Lao-hu's bare hands. But before the enemy soldier could strike, Chin-shan came running up with half a dozen fighters and finished him off.

Lao-hu sighed with relief. He felt numb all over and his head was whirling. He remembered he had come to rescue Chin-shan. Had he saved him?

"Chin-shan!" he called.

"Platoon leader!" cried Chin-shan, hurrying toward him.

Lao-hu grabbed him by the arm and was just about to say something when he heard footsteps.

"Enemy!" he shouted.

Chin-shan led the men to meet the attacking foe.

I've got to get up! thought Lao-hu. He was weak; there seemed to be stars floating before his eyes. Gritting his teeth, he tried to drag

himself erect. Just then, an enemy soldier leaped from the mound on to his back. With a mighty wrench, Lao-hu twisted around and got his knees against the fellow's chest. Grasping the enemy's neck with both hands, Lao-hu choked the life out of him.

Late at night, the north wind began to blow across the ancient Great Wall, stretching endlessly into the distance. On the battlefield where the PLA men had fought so heroically, scattered embers and occasional rifle shots were the only remaining signs of the struggle.

VI

After Ta-yung and the company broke out of the encirclement, they headed directly southeast. They soon left the enemy far behind, because Lao-hu had drawn the KMT soldiers in the opposite direction.

They passed village after village—all deserted. Who knew where the terrors of war had driven the country folk!

The men had fought for almost twenty-four hours without a let-up. They were tired, cold, hungry, thirsty. But what each of them craved most was five minutes sleep—on the ground beside the road or even in the mud if need be. To be able to lie down and sleep—just for a little while—would be the sweetest thing in the world!

When they were getting away from the enemy, a shell had exploded near Ta-yung, burying him and injuring his head. He had fainted from the concussion. Chiang-kuo had instructed one of the men to carry him.

About five miles from the battlefield, they came upon a small village. Chiang-kuo went in first to scout. The place was silent and empty as a tomb; there was not even a dog to be seen. It made Chiang-kuo's flesh creep. Then he spied a lamp glowing faintly in a window. Chiang-kuo tiptoed into the courtyard, poked a hole in the paper window and peered inside. An old man and an old woman were seated on a *kang*. A woman of about thirty sat beside them suckling a baby. In the corner of the *kang*, a little child was crawling around. Lying in the middle of the *kang* was the body of a young woman. A sheet of paper covered her face; a small lamp burned at her head. The old woman was weeping in the flickering light.

After posting guards around the village, Chiang-kuo carried Ta-yung into the house.

Ta-yung sat on the floor beside the *kang*, his back against the wall. Exhaustion and loss of blood made him dizzy. His face was white.

After a few minutes rest, he slowly began to recover. He felt rotten; disconnected thoughts tumbled in his brain.

The old folks bustled about helping Chiang-kuo wash the blood from Ta-yung's face and giving Ta-yung some boiled water to drink.

Chiang-kuo was the first one Ta-yung saw when he opened his eyes. Good old Chiang-kuo! Was there ever a dearer friend? The platoon leader tried to induce him to lie down, but Ta-yung frowned to indicate his refusal.

Ta-yung sat with his hands resting on the ground on either side of him, his nails digging into the earthen floor. There was a black mist before his eyes, and the thought kept stabbing him—What am I doing here? . . . My men need me. . . . Vitality slowly returned to his body. Burning, he forced his eyes open wide and sat as straight as he could. He felt the most important thing was sit erect.

Chiang-kuo and the old people carried the body of the young woman on a wooden door and placed it on the floor to the rear of the room. The old lady swept the *kang* and spread a quilt on it to make a place for Ta-yung.

Ta-yung's mind was quite clear now. His first concern was for Lao-hu. He asked Chiang-kuo, who said he had already sent men to search. Chiang-kuo and the old folks wanted to lift Ta-yung onto the *kang*. Ta-yung shook his head.

"I'm fine sitting right here."

Chiang-kuo knew his character, and immediately stood aside. But the old people continued to insist.

"You can't just sit on the floor," said the old man. "See, we've got the quilt all laid out for you."

Ta-yung still shook his head.

"You look as if you'd been fished out of a river of blood," cried the old lady impatiently. "*Ai!* Get up onto the *kang*. You can't feel for the starving with a full belly, the saying goes, but we know too well what it means to suffer. There's not a grain of millet in our cauldron! Hurry, lie down on the *kang!*"

That the old lady could pity others in the midst of her own tribulations, her kind generous voice, touched Ta-yung to the quick. But he wouldn't change his mind.

"If I lie on the *kang*, I'll stain your quilt with blood," he said, and seeing the irritated expression on Chiang-kuo's face, he explained, "I can't make their quilt all dirty. . . ."

Chiang-kuo was bursting with anxiety. "Commander," he cried, "when you go up the mountainside, you cut fuel; when you cross the stream, you take off your shoes. You have to act according to the situation. Things are so tough now . . . you're in such bad shape . . . I really don't understand you—"

"Comrade, this is enemy territory," Ta-yung interrupted. He spoke with difficulty. "To the people here we represent the Party and Chairman Mao. Don't you see? The harder things are . . . the more we have to. . . ." He clamped his mouth shut. Sweat stood out on his

forehead. He closed his eyes and leaned his head against the wall, breathing hard. His own words had moved him deeply.

"If only you get well, we won't care if the sky falls!" Chiang-kuo said frantically. "We're all depending on you, but you—you just won't think of yourself—"

"Think of myself?" said Ta-yung angrily. "I'm not worth it. You. . . ." He ground his teeth and turned his head away as if too furious to get out the words seething inside him, or perhaps it was to steel himself against the pain of his wound.

The old lady stared at him, amazed, then tears came to her eyes. She sat down on the edge of the *kang* and wiped her tears with the hem of her tunic.

"You've been hurt so badly and you still can think of us and worry about our quilt. *Ai!* There are good people in this world after all! When did anyone ever care about the sufferings of the poor!"

Squatting on his heels, the old man rapped the brass bowl of his long-stemmed pipe against the floor. "Lie on the *kang*," he urged Ta-yung. "Don't hurt our feelings. This isn't the first time the PLA's come to our village. You shouldn't treat us like strangers!"

"I said I won't, and that's final. But don't feel hurt, old uncle. I know what good hearts you have. . . . I've been cold and hungry myself. So I know how precious a poor man's quilt is. It's the life of his whole family!"

Ta-yung kept clenching his teeth. Cold sweat beaded his forehead. With his entire being he struggled against the pain.

In spite of the old man's attempts to stop her, the old lady poured out the family's tale of woe. The bitter story was like hundreds of others Ta-yung had heard—rent, taxes, forced labour, illness, hunger, no clothing, the son conscripted into the KMT army, the daughter-in-law ravished to death; a family that knew nothing but endless toil, plundered bare in a twinkling by the KMT bandits, burned out . . . a pit of bottomless grief, weeping tears of pure blood!

As Ta-yung's gaze swept the room of the poor peasants, a large stone seemed to be crushing his chest. The tiny old lady was as thin as a stick. Toward the rear of the room on the left lay the body of the daughter-in-law who had been raped to death by the KMT military police. The child sitting on the *kang* had a large head, but his arms were no thicker than thumbs. Six years old, he looked about three. The clothing of the thirty-year-old woman seated on the edge of the *kang* was too threadbare to hide her nakedness. Her eyes were deeply sunken; on her neck was a large goitre. With every suck of the avid infant at her breast, her face contracted in pain. Ta-yung felt as if the child was gnawing at his own heart. He was sure the baby was drawing blood. The mother had no other nourishment to give!

How could they have existed like this, generation after generation? Tears swam in Ta-yung's eyes. The peasants' images were blurred, wavering like grass in the wind. His heart was boiling in oil. Bitter tears ran down his cheeks. This little house was a world of tragedy. Compared with the agonies of these people, his own wound, the cruel battle the fighters had just been through, all seemed trifles.

Ta-yung turned his back on the lamp light. "Chiang-kuo," he said, "call our men in here to see this. . . . We must remember!"

"It's not necessary, commander. Every family is just the same." Chiang-kuo stood facing the door. He was weeping too.

"Are there really men like this?" marvelled the country folk, staring at Ta-yung. They were moved; they were surprised. For generations they had known only extortion, oppression, and grinding, interminable poverty. But these PLA fighters—though neither relatives nor even neighbours—were willing to lay down their lives for the poor. . . .

"Chiang-kuo," said Ta-yung, "send men out right away to find Lao-hu and the others. Hurry it up. I'm worried sick about them!"

"I sent out a search party long ago. Long ago!"

"Where's Chuan-yu and Chang-sheng and the others?"

"On guard duty. The leader of Platoon Three is in the courtyard looking after the wounded."

"Who's acting as company Party secretary?"

"Don't you remember? After Lao-hu went on the cover mission, you told me to take over."

Ta-yung knitted his brows. The pain was making him irritable.

"What kind of a secretary are you supposed to be?" he demanded. "Standing there like a statue! Quit fussing over me and call a meeting of the Party committee, or at least put some of the members to work! A fine secretary you are! We've had heavy casualties. Come to life; get those Party members into action! Or maybe you've got some better way? As a Party secretary you're a flop. Things get tough and you don't know what you're supposed to do!"

"Commander, your wound!" cried Chiang-kuo, rubbing his thighs with agitation. "Don't talk so much; keep calm! I'll do whatever you say!"

"Then bring the Party committee here!"

"But they're all on sentry duty, commander. I can't pull them off at a time like this!"

"If you can't get the committee, bring me a couple of the Party group leaders. Snap into it!"

A few minutes later, five Party group leaders hurried in, panting and breathless. With concern, they scanned the commander's face.

Supporting himself against the wall, Ta-yung stood up.

"Lie down, commander!" Chiang-kuo cried.

"I can't lie down now. My men need me. I'm all right. Leave me alone."

Chiang-kuo dragged him by the arm. "Please. . . ."

"Let go!" said Ta-yung angrily. "I don't have to lie around groaning just because of a little wound. I want to stand and I'm going to stand!"

Leaning on the wall, Ta-yung braced himself. His head felt immense, his legs soft as cotton, black streaks swirling before his eyes. But sight of the group leaders gave him strength.

"Tell the men I haven't really been wounded. My head just got a little scrape, that's all," he said. "We were badly mauled today, comrades. Let's face it. Lao-hu and his men haven't come back yet. The situation is still very dangerous. There may be an even bigger battle lying ahead of us. You're all acting squad and platoon leaders. If anything should happen to any of the regular leaders, take over automatically."

The group leaders watched Ta-yung unblinkingly. They could see the perspiration on his upper lip and the tip of his nose.

"Comrades, Communists aren't ordinary men. Without them, China would be finished. Without them, the working people would never be able to rise. Communists don't quit as long as they live; when they die, they die like heroes. That's because they know their duty to the working people!" He looked at each of the men, from face to face. "Tell every one of our Communists: Rally the men around you; fight the enemy to the death. Every KMT soldier we kill is one less class enemy. Just remember that and everything will be all right—"

Ta-yung suddenly leaned heavily against the wall. Chiang-kuo rushed up and threw his arms around him as support. Chiang-kuo was almost in tears.

"Commander, nothing must happen to you. . . ."

When Ta-yung opened his eyes again, the group leaders had gone. But I hadn't finished, he thought. Then he turned his head and saw Chiang-kuo holding him up from behind.

"What are you cradling me for?" he growled. "I'm no baby! Go find Lao-hu. Go on, be quick about it!"

Just as Chiang-kuo was about to depart, the men who had covered the company's withdrawal arrived in the village.

Ta-yung was happy but worried. He couldn't wait to hear how the fighters had fared. He yelled for Lao-hu, but his shout was drowned by the noisy chatter in the courtyard.

"Today was really dangerous!"

"Danger and victory are old friends!"

"I learned one thing today: The weaker you act, the more the enemy takes advantage; the tougher you act, the more they fear you!"

"We killed and wounded at least five hundred of them!"

"Even thin strands, if you weave 'em real tight, make a good strong rope. So of course when we people's fighters stick close together, the enemy doesn't stand a chance!"

"The sons of bitches'll have a hard time explaining this day's work to old Truman!"

Ta-yung's heart beat wildly. He couldn't hear Lao-hu's drawl among the excited voices. From the men's cheerful tone, he guessed that probably nothing had happened to him, but immediately he reprimanded himself: You can't be so sure. Nothing can hold down the men's spirits for long.

When Chiang-kuo came in a moment later, Ta-yung didn't have to ask. The grief written on Chiang-kuo's face, in spite of his attempt to conceal it, was clearer than any words could be. Ta-yung's heart turned to ice and the blood congealed in his veins. Lao-hu dead? Never. Impossible. Afraid to ask, yet he had to know.

"Lao-hu?"

"Killed in action!"

For a long time no one spoke. The little flame in the lamp danced and flickered. The peasant family stared at Ta-yung and Chiang-kuo. The heavy atmosphere was oppressive.

"Where is his body?" said Ta-yung.

"Probably buried where he fell."

"Probably!" cried Ta-yung sharply. "Probably! You muddle-headed nitwit!"

Chiang-kuo couldn't get his words out fast enough. "Commander, commander, what can I say? I . . . commander, Chin-shan said they buried the dead before they left. . . . In the middle of the night . . . nobody could see anything too clearly. . . ."

"What's this?" snapped Ta-yung. "They couldn't identify his body? If Lao-hu died, a thousand years from now people will still be able to recognize his bones!" Ta-yung's breathing was short and rapid.

Chiang-kuo wrung his hands, kneaded his chest. "Anyhow . . . anyhow, I can't say for sure. I. . . ." What could he say? He was just as affected by Lao-hu's death as the commander.

Ta-yung sat with his back against the wall, his eyes fixed on the side of the *kang*. Why, wasn't that Lao-hu? Lao-hu had been wounded. He was lying on a wooden door, he was smeared all over with earth and blood, he had fainted. . . . Ta-yung's vision suddenly vanished and his heart was stricken with grief. I can't bring back the comrades the Party entrusted to me. . . .

He grabbed the wall and wrenched himself to his feet. He would question Chin-shan himself. He had to know exactly how Lao-hu died!

Chiang-kuo tried to stop him. "Commander, don't move. You're—"

Ta-yung pushed him aside. "My men are falling one by one. What have *I* got to be afraid? A scraped head . . . !"

The wind blew fitfully. Dark clouds scudded across the sky. Frogs were croaking in the tall sorghum outside the door.

Ta-yung could hear the men talking near the compound wall. They were all discussing Chin-shan. Probably it was Chin-shan who had led them back. But to Ta-yung, it seemed that they were grouped around Lao-hu, chatting, and that Lao-hu was squatting in an obscure corner, smiling and slowly puffing on his short pipe. But then a small voice reminded him: Lao-hu is dead! And Ta-yung's heart was seared and hot tears rolled down his cheeks.

Lao-hu! Have you really left us? Ta-yung felt as if one of his arms had been hacked off.

He sought out the men who had fought beside Lao-hu and questioned each of them minutely. He found that not one of them could say definitely how Lao-hu had died. Among the effects brought back of the fallen comrades, there was nothing that belonged to him. Ta-yung weighed every detail as carefully as he analyzed the situation during a battle. He came to the conclusion that there was a thread of hope.

Lao-hu might still be alive!

VII

About three-thirty in the morning, Ta-yung led his men toward the southeast. The fighters had improvised a stretcher of thick branches and wanted to carry him, but Ta-yung resolutely refused. At first he walked with a stick. After a few miles he threw even that away.

It was very cold and the wind was whistling. The sky was like a sheet of ice, basted thick with stars, twinkling cold and clear.

The long shadowy column tramped on. Bearing the scars of battle, the men carried their wounded companions across shifting sands and muddy wastes. Hungry, they painfully groped their way through the darkness with only the stars for a cover, ready to be plunged into desperate struggle at any moment.

Ta-yung marched alongside the column, listening to men's quiet conversations. Some said they were so hungry their stomachs were sticking to their backbones, and talked about what they'd like most to eat. Some said they'd give anything for only one minute's nap. Another said he was so irritable from lack of sleep, he'd like to pick a quarrel.

"Quit your nonsense, comrades," Ta-yung interrupted. "Listen to me—" But before he could continue, Yu-ming, leader of the advance squad, rushed back to report:

"Enemy troops ahead!"

"How many?" Ta-yung asked quickly.

"Can't tell exactly. Saw seven or eight moving outside that village up ahead. Look like a patrol."

At the word "enemy" Ta-yung's heart burst into flame. He was burning for revenge, and his vitality bounded back as if he had never been hurt and exhausted. He directed Chiang-kuo to get the men under cover in the shelter of a bluff. After resting a few minutes, he took Chang-sheng and Chuan-yu, and went ahead to investigate.

The three men followed a highway directly south. They walked or crept forward softly. Suddenly, Chuan-yu fell heavily to the ground.

Automatically, Ta-yung ripped out his revolver. Chang-sheng prodded Chuan-yu with his foot.

"Get up, you clumsy ox!"

Stealing closer to the village, they found the road sprinkled with grain. Ta-yung halted at the foot of a bluff near the road. He pondered silently, a blade of grass in his teeth. Chang-sheng didn't want to interrupt his commander's thoughts, and he continued to creep forward. In spite of his rough exterior, Chang-sheng had a keen mind. He too analyzed every stick and stone encountered in his path.

Why so much grain on the highway? Ta-yung wondered. Could there be an enemy grain station in the village? If there is, we'll destroy it! He was obsessed with the idea of striking the enemy. The prospect excited him, stimulated him.

Yet a small voice within him protested: What if there is a grain station? Pass it by, even if it isn't heavily manned. The men are too worn out!

That's a disgraceful way to think! another voice immediately retorted. Are we going to let a chance to hit the enemy slip by? Are we the kind who scare easily, and turn tail and run? Isn't this our chance to avenge Lao-hu and Wan-sheng? Fight! Fight! Every enemy soldier we wipe out is one less calamity-maker in the world!

Chang-sheng came back to report: "There's a lot of millet on the road up ahead, and a dead donkey. My guess is that there's an enemy grain station in the village, for sure."

"There's nothing sure about it!" said Chuan-yu. "The station may be in some village beyond here."

Ta-yung circled around to the opposite side of the village, where the road again emerged. The road here was free of grain.

He examined the village from all sides. The enemy troops didn't have the appearance of men camping after a day's march, nor were there any telephone lines running out of the village. It looked like a grain station all right, protected by a garrison. And grain was of first importance both to us and to the enemy.

The three men returned to the company which was waiting for them under cover north of the village. Ta-yung called a meeting of squad and platoon leaders and related his findings. Everyone agreed they should attack.

"Let's go, commander!" Chiang-kuo kept urging. "Night raids, hand-to-hand fighting—that's what the enemy fears most!"

"That's right," said Chang-sheng. "They never know what's hitting 'em in night raids. Let's chew into 'em!"

Ta-yung too was seething to get at the enemy. But he was still puzzled about the patrol he had seen—why did it patrol only east of the village? Was it because there were other enemy camps in the neighbourhood? And how many troops were there in the village? How were they deployed? He didn't like these holes in his knowledge.

"Decide, commander, decide!" Chuan-yu insisted. "Every battle has its risks. Let's just slam into them. We'll catch them off guard and knock them dizzy."

"If only we're right about the situation, I'm all for polishing off the enemy troops in the village!" said Ta-yung.

News of the impending battle quickly spread through the ranks. No one had told them, but the men could feel it in their bones. They began tightening their leg-wrappings, adjusting their knapsacks and belts. Nothing could depress their fighting spirit for long!

The men's enthusiasm infected Ta-yung. He was stirred by the pre-battle tension and excitement, the desire to succeed, to perform heroic deeds. But his sense of responsibility as a leader clashed with his emotional urge to drive ahead blindly, and the conflict made him irritable.

With his mouth close to Chin-shan's ear he whispered, "Take a man with you and bring back a prisoner we can question. I want a prisoner, but no matter what happens you're not to fire your gun or make any noise. Can you do it?"

"There's no question of can or can't. You want a prisoner and we'll get you one."

Ta-yung slapped Chin-shan on the back. "Do your stuff!"

With his younger brother Erh-tze, Chin-shan set out toward the village.

"What are you carrying that's clanking so?" Chin-shan asked him.

"Must be my drinking cup hitting against the handle of a hand grenade."

"Well, stop it right away! You do everything so careless and sloppy; I'm worried about you every time we go into battle. When you have to run across a stretch of open ground, you first ought to see what there is up ahead you can use for cover. But you—you just don't use your head!" He rubbed Erh-tze's back. "Cold?"

"Freezing. I don't mind that so much, but I'm dying for sleep. I can't keep my eyes open."

"Don't you dare doze off. Haven't you applied to join the Party? I took you with me to give you a chance to distinguish yourself."

"What about your application? Any news? You're the only squad leader in our company who isn't a Communist."

"Don't remind me! If I only had known how much I'd suffer for going 'over the hill,' I'd have died before pulling a shameful stunt like that. I'm willing to die now, if blood can wipe out my disgrace!"

"From the way I hear the Party members talk, they all think you ought to be admitted."

"Even if they do, I don't want to join yet!"

Erh-tze drew a sharp breath. "Why not? Brother, what do you mean?"

"Nothing." They were crawling on the ground and Chin-shan pressed his face against his arm. "I'm not going to let myself join the Party. Just look at the Communists in our company! They face danger without batting an eye. And they have such wonderful ideals: Not only do they want the poor to have land and enough to eat—they even want to lead them to socialism. How can I compare with such men? I'm full of faults! Erh-tze, I'm sure I can go forward following the line of the Party, but I'm not good enough to be a Communist. So I'm not going to join, no matter how much it hurts!"

Erh-tze could hear his brother weeping. How badly he must feel! Erh-tze regretted he had prodded his brother's open wound. He changed the subject.

"When do you think we'll catch up with our main forces? . . ."

Chin-shan poked him, signalling him to come along. They crept to the shelter of a bluff where they stopped and rested. Only then did Chin-shan reply.

"Don't you worry about our main forces. Our army fights in many different ways. Even our own company can't find our main forces; what chance has the enemy got? But I guarantee in nine or ten days they'll suddenly show up somewhere and win a big victory. I've seen it happen many times!"

"Our army is always rushing around like the wind, here one minute and there the next. Why don't we line up squarely against the enemy? They're only a bunch of useless straw-bellies. In a pitched battle we could clean them out in a couple of days!"

"Pitched battle? There are hundreds of thousands of them; do you know how many we've got? Suppose you were in command? How would you fight such a battle? I told you time and again—we're fighting a war of movement. When it's to our advantage, we strike. When it's not, we move somewhere else. We finish them off bit by bit. They crumble while we keep getting stronger. But that's on one condition—that we cover lots of ground and stand up under hardships."

"It's ourselves we're fighting for, when you come right down to it. So we'll stand up to the hardships all right. You can bet on that."

The two brothers crept to the wall surrounding the village.

"Squat down," whispered Chin-shan. "I'll get on your shoulders and then you boost me to the top of the wall."

"No. Let me go first."

"I'm the squad leader," Chin-shan hissed. "You obey my orders!"

The word "orders" had a magical effect. Erh-tze suppressed his eager emotions.

Before long, Chin-shan and Erh-tze returned to their waiting comrades. From his back Chin-shan tossed a heavy object at Ta-yung's feet. It landed with a thump.

"Erh-tze, take the gag out of his mouth!"

"*Aiya, aiya*, don't kill me! . . ." groaned the thing on the ground.

"Why did you bring a man that's half dead?" demanded Ta-yung.

"I had to clip him a few to quiet him down, didn't I?" said Chin-shan. "Go on, question him, commander. There's nothing wrong with his mouth." And he added hastily, "Erh-tze made the capture single-handed!"

Ta-yung shook hands with Erh-tze, then questioned the prisoner. The man said that after the enemy Thirty-sixth Division had relieved Yulin, it travelled south down the main highway in pursuit of the PLA. As for the village, there was a large grain station in it, guarded by a battalion. Two of the battalion's three companies were out escorting grain shipments. Only battalion headquarters and one company remained in the village. The commanding officer was a lieutenant-colonel. A low wall ran around the village, with gates on the north and south sides. That same night a KMT regiment had quartered itself in a village about two miles to the west. The prisoner claimed that the PLA had lost more than half its forces after leaving Yulin; the remainder had fled to the Yellow River and was trying to cross. So the garrison guarding the grain station was very relaxed. The enemy soldiers were eating and drinking and enjoying life.

When his company attacked the village would the shooting arouse the nearby enemy regiment? wondered Ta-yung. No. The regiment wouldn't be able to tell immediately what was happening in the dark and would not dare to make any sudden moves. Night fighting had special characteristics . . . the enemy feared being cut off, surrounded. . . . In the PLA company there remained a total of thirty-eight men. Ta-yung sent a squad under Chuan-yu to wipe out the patrol and serve as guards during the battle. But what about the assault on the village? Once we get in there, victory will be ours, Ta-yung thought, then he hesitated. We can start the fight easily enough, but finishing it may not be so easy! He had to know more about the set-up in the village. He decided to reconnoitre the outskirts himself. After a few words of instruction to Chiang-kuo, he set out with five soldiers.

Outside the north end of the village they stopped and listened. They rested a few minutes, then proceeded quietly to a gully which approached the village from the northeast. The gully was seven or eight feet deep. In it was a wide road leading directly to the village.

Exhaustion virtually paralyzed Ta-yung's arms and legs and his head wound stabbed with pain. Lying on the edge of the gully, he rested his head on the backs of his hands. If our men go in through here, they'll have some cover, he mused, but the enemy's sure to be watching a big road like this. As he pondered, he thought he detected a noise in the distance. He pressed his ear against the ground and listened. But the earth was damp and transmitted sound poorly. He tried listening, holding his breath. There was a noise all right, and it was coming closer. About ten minutes later, a train of pack animals approached. Ta-yung and his men quickly hid in the tall sorghum.

"Travelling at night is dangerous," said a voice from the road. "We ought to be very careful."

"How much more careful can you get? You can't wrap your head in iron!"

Enemy soldiers! Ta-yung grew tense. Tightly clutching the icy handle of his Mauser in a grip that habit made sure, he watched the road. A number of camels led the procession and on them were seated enemy soldiers with rifles slung across their backs. The soldiers swayed as if asleep in their saddles. Behind the camels came a long train of donkeys.

An idea flashed into Ta-yung's mind. The donkey drivers must be peasants. Why not jump down and mingle among them and go with them into the village? Ta-yung was thinking furiously. What if there were enemy soldiers in the donkey train? Get involved in a fight out here? Should he slip into the train personally? He was dizzy and his legs were weak. Besides, he had to lead the company! Send for Chiang-kuo or Chuan-yu? No good. By the time one of them could arrive, the dish would be cold. Let a couple of soldiers sneak in with the train? No. The men with him were all inexperienced. There was too much at stake. One false move and they'd give the whole show away!

The donkeys were still passing. But he had to make up his mind at once.

He whispered in the ear of one of the fighters, giving him instructions for Chiang-kuo on how to enter the village. Ta-yung told the man to fly, then said something to the other four soldiers.

Edging forward, his neck rigid, Ta-yung fixed his eyes unblinking on the road. One by one, the little donkeys continued to parade past. He patted his head wound, then set his teeth and leaped into the road. The four soldiers jumped behind him.

Ta-yung grabbed a driver. "Don't make a sound!" he threatened in a low voice.

The man was frightened. "No, no. I won't open my mouth!"

"Got a gun?"

"I'm a peasant. They forced me to come along and drive donkeys!"

"Liar!"

"I swear! As sure as I've white teeth in a red mouth! May Heaven strike me dead if I'm telling even half a lie!"

Ta-yung ran his hands over the man's body. The fellow had a white towel turban on his head, was wearing an old fleece-lined gown and had a long-stemmed pipe stuck in the sash around his waist. A peasant, unquestionably. Ta-yung released his breath.

The peasant was trembling violently. Who was this man who had suddenly dropped from the sky? What did he want?

"Where are you from, uncle?"

"Out—outside Yulin," stammered the peasant.

"What are you doing out here with these donkeys in the middle of the night?"

"I'm a hired farm hand. Last night the running dog of the ward boss dragged me off to ship grain for the army."

Ta-yung felt the sacks on the donkey. There was grain in them, that was true. He considered what the man had said and the tone of his voice.

One of the fighters came up and reported that all the drivers in the train were peasants, each driving four or five donkeys; armed enemy soldiers on camels were bringing up the rear. Ta-yung said a few words to the fighter, then continued questioning the peasant.

"Is the enemy escort large?"

"No. Just one squad in front and one behind."

"Do you know who I am?"

"I—I can't say for sure!"

"I'm a soldier of the PLA!"

The peasant thought a moment. "Ah, so you're PLA men!"

"There's a division of us, uncle, come to attack the enemy in this village. Show us the way in, what do you say?"

"Why, why—of course! I, I've never been in a battle before. . . . You're really PLA men? Then take my fleece gown. Wear it to hide your uniform!"

"Are the other country folk driving the donkeys reliable?"

"Every one of them. They're all poor. You don't think any rich man would be sent out on a job like this!"

"You go and talk to them. Tell them to cover our men."

"That can be done, that can be done."

"Not can—must! If anything goes wrong, you'll all be caught right in the middle!"

"Do my best!" said the peasant, and he trotted off toward the rear.

As the caravan drew close to the village, shots were heard to the east. Chuan-yu and his squad must be clashing with the enemy patrol!

From the village came a clamour of shouts.

The soldiers on the dozen camels at the head of the procession reached the north gate and, after an exchange with the sentries, entered the

village. They were followed by the five or six donkeys immediately ahead of Ta-yung. His eyes swept the gate entrance. Enemy soldiers were standing in fox-holes; some stood beside the gate; a few were running back and forth. They seemed to be in a bad state of jitters.

A wild scene met Ta-yung's gaze as he walked through the gate. The street was jammed with soldiers assembling into ranks. Shouts, whistles blowing, curses, the whinny of horses and donkeys, filled the air with an insane tumult. Ta-yung's eyes darted in every direction. He was tense, his heart beating fast, a joyous excitement rising into his throat. His vision seemed exceptionally keen; he felt powerful, agile. He wanted to rush madly, yelling, firing, to slash these murderous cannibals to pieces. He dispatched two fighters to take up positions at the north gate they had just entered, and to control it when the time came. At his side he kept only Erh-tze and Yu-ming.

On the steps of a peasant's house stood an officer. He was shining a flashlight all around and shouting:

"Quiet in the ranks! Those shots to the east were only our patrol running into a few enemy stragglers. Where is your battalion commander? Will the battalion commander please come forward? What are you soldiers in such a panic about? Swine! Cowardly dogs!"

A man with a brief case rushed up and saluted. "Colonel, the major will be here immediately!"

Ta-yung's heart jumped. So that's the lieutenant-colonel! Glancing behind him, he could see Erh-tze and Yu-ming gathering themselves to spring.

He ran out, pointed his pistol at the side of the lieutenant-colonel's head and pulled the trigger. There was a loud report and the officer slumped to the ground like a sack of grain.

The entire street became a bedlam. There were wild shots, foul curses, yells and shouts. From the south end of the street a man on a big horse came charging into the milling crowd. He reined in the animal so abruptly that the horse's front hoofs pawed the air. Whinnying sharply, the animal trampled men, and the men struck back at the maddened beast with their rifle butts. The horse plunged forward a few steps, then fell to its knees while its rider fired his pistol into the air, twice.

"Listen to my orders!" the man howled. "Company Two. I want the commander of Company Two. . . ."

Yu-ming said something to Ta-yung, then pushed his way through the crowd. A moment later he drove his bayonet up through the rider's ribs. The man squealed like a stuck pig and fell from the horse. Terrified, the animal leaped over the heads of the jammed soldiers and bolted down the street. . . .

The two fighters Ta-yung had sent to the gate finished off the guards and sealed the north exit. Ta-yung, Yu-ming and Erh-tze sprayed the enemy soldiers in the narrow street and threw hand grenades.

Thoroughly confused, some enemy troops ran south, others dashed north, their panic increasing by the minute.

At the same time, the firing east of the village increased in intensity, and the sound of it drew nearer.

Ta-yung was all in a lather for fear that enemy soldiers would climb to the roofs of the buildings that flanked the street. But they had lost any semblance of order. Officers were separated from their men; men couldn't find their officers. Soldiers swarmed in all directions.

Puffing and panting, Chiang-kuo and his men came running up the gully road and entered the village. They immediately set up three light machine guns and turned them on the enemy in the street.

"First get some men up on the roof-tops," Ta-yung ordered.

"I've done that long ago!" replied Chiang-kuo.

Almost before the words were out of his mouth, from the houses on both sides of the street, hand grenades began raining down on the heads of the enemy soldiers. In the light of the flames, enemy soldiers could be seen falling left and right. The village rang with the cries of the PLA fighters:

"Throw down your arms and be spared!"

"The PLA treats prisoners well!"

In twenty minutes the battle was over.

The street was ablaze. It was littered with enemy bodies, dead horses and mules, quilts, mortars, small cannon, heavy machine guns. . . .

Chiang-kuo rounded up the prisoners and counted them. There were over a hundred. He separated the officers from the men and assigned guards.

Ta-yung shook Chang-sheng's hand. "Wasn't that you in charge of our men on the roof-tops? You did a beautiful job!"

"We made them pay with a hundred lives for our one Lao-hu!"

Entering the house formerly occupied by the enemy battalion commander, Ta-yung was intending to question a few of the prisoners about the neighbouring countryside. Suddenly heavy firing was heard to the west. Ta-yung pressed his fists on the table in front of him, his face grave. After thinking a while, he turned to Chiang-kuo.

"Pick out a dozen or two of the more shifty-eyed prisoners and let them escape. But before that, let word 'leak' out that our forces are very large and that we're moving north."

"The enemy will see through that without batting an eye."

"Maybe so. But getting all kinds of conflicting reports, they'll have to analyze them, and while they're analyzing we can be ten miles away from here. Besides, they're pretty cautious about how they move about in the dark."

While the men were picking up usable equipment off the battlefield, Chiang-kuo called back the guard patrol that had been stationed west of the village. Then Ta-yung had the fighters load up with a good supply of ammunition, made the prisoners carry rifles from which the bolts had been removed, and marched the company out of the village. They advanced quietly toward the southeast.

After they had covered about two miles, a scout hurried back to report that a battalion had been moving east from the village where the enemy regiment was stationed, but that it had suddenly turned and fled back to its village and was now feverishly throwing up fortifications.

Ta-yung grinned. "They can go on with their work while we continue our march—each not interfering with the other!"

VIII

The company marched a few more miles and entered a wide gorge.

Shortly before dawn, the fighters climbed a mountain, they then halted for a short rest. Ta-yung had just sat down when blood began pouring out of his mouth.

"Commander, what's wrong?" Chiang-kuo cried in alarm.

Ta-yung kicked some earth over the blood on the ground. "Nothing. Don't make a fuss."

"You're stubborn and tough but—"

"Take it easy, Chiang-kuo. I've been fighting and making forced marches for years. I don't fold up in a hurry."

"We two have been through a lot together, commander. You shouldn't try to fool me!"

Ta-yung put his arm across Chiang-kuo's shoulders.

"You're right, old friend.—Things are in bad shape. But right now you and I have to think of our men first. They've been soaked by the rain, they've fought, shed blood. They've had no food, no sleep; they've walked their feet down to the bone. After battling without a let-up they've had to march, the slightly wounded carrying the badly wounded. Chiang-kuo, they haven't said a word, but I know they're gritting their teeth to carry on. It's been much rougher on them than on me. Am I tired? Of course, tired, worn out! My head wound isn't serious, but during that last fight I strained too hard and it's split open again. My head's roaring fit to bust. I'm dying to sleep, even if I had to face a powerful enemy when I woke up. But when I think of the men, I want to do everything I can to urge them on. You must understand that. Sometimes you really are thick! . . . Chiang-kuo, I've got an idea. Get a couple of prisoners who come from poor families to tell our men what life is like in the enemy army, especially how the common soldier is treated like dirt. It'll be a good education for them."

"Yes, we ought to do that. But anyhow, you must take care of yourself. You—"

Ta-yung cut him short. "Let's go. Dawn is breaking!"

Chiang-kuo brought his head close. "Commander, let me say one word—"

Ta-yung pushed him aside and stood up. "Let's go, comrades!" he called.

The men crawled to their feet, stretching, rubbing their eyes. Many, though standing, were still fast asleep.

With his back against a bluff, Chiang-kuo stood motionless. Gloomily he peered at the sprinkling of stars in the grey dawn sky. For the first time he felt disturbed.

"Pass the word along," Ta-yung to the men nearest him. "Stick close together. No one is allowed to drop out of ranks!"

Ta-yung set out with large strides at the head of the column. From time to time he stepped to the side of the road and watched the men march past, listening carefully to the rhythm of their feet and the sound of their heavy breathing.

After they had travelled three or four miles, suddenly, a whisper swept through the column:

"Keep your eyes open for the enemy!"

Ta-yung heard the whinnying of pack animals on the mountain to the left. Looking up, he saw a string of many shadows on the ridge, moving south. This must be the Thirty-sixth Division of KMT warlord Hu Tsung-nan. After relieving Yulin it had immediately turned south in search of the PLA. The troops on the ridge had not yet noticed Ta-yung and his PLA fighters marching in the gorge.

Quickly ordering his men to take cover, Ta-yung climbed to a piece of higher ground and examined the surrounding terrain. They were hemmed in by mountains on all sides. The gorge was flat and not very wide and was covered with scattered wild date and willow trees. A small stream cut through the length of the gorge from the foot of the mountain on the north. Ta-yung ordered the men to place the eight heavily wounded in a cave; he told Chuan-yu to take seven men and escort the prisoners to the concealment of a bluff near the stream and keep them quiet. With Chiang-kuo and thirty fighters, Ta-yung then began climbing the eastern mountain. Their idea was to get to a position where they could defend the withdrawal of the wounded and the prisoners in case the enemy discovered them.

The men who remained in the gorge were unable to light a fire for cooking, nor could they drink any water, although the stream was flowing right before them. All day long, enemy soldiers and pack animals continued passing south along the western ridge.

At sunset, Ta-yung slipped down the eastern slope in a rapid zigzag and returned to the cave where the wounded were resting. He intended to lead them out after dark.

In the cave he found the little medical orderly, San Niu, feeding uncooked millet to the wounded men. The millet was among the stores captured the night before. Now it was the best item in the fighters' diet.

The men were pale from loss of blood, their eyes large and sunken. The wounds of several were very painful. When San Niu changed their dressings, many had to clench their teeth, the sweat standing out on their foreheads. But not one groaned or cried out. When the pain became too unbearable, a man stuffed clothing in his own mouth and bit into it hard. Each feared that the sound of his suffering might depress his companions.

Ta-yung would have given anything to be able to take some of their pain on himself. In an agony of sympathy he crawled from one wounded man to the next, wiping sweat from their faces, looking into the eyes of his dear friends.

"It's much cheerier with you here, commander!" said one.

"If it weren't for us wounded holding them back, our comrades would have strolled out of here long ago," another said worriedly.

"It'll be dark in another hour, comrades," Ta-yung told them. "Then we can leave. Maybe, before daylight, we'll get back to the liberated area and catch up with our army. How happy everyone will be to see us!"

He sat leaning against the wall. An instant later, he was asleep. He dreamed he was riding a red sorrel stallion, flying across a plain through smoke and shell. He was shouting commands and the men were charging at the enemy like the wind, like a rushing cataract. . . .

"Commander!" cried a voice.

Ta-yung opened his eyes. Night and Chuan-yu had entered the cave together.

"What are you doing here?" Ta-yung demanded quickly.

"Come to see how you and the wounded are getting on."

Ta-yung scrambled to his feet. "You're guarding over eighty prisoners with only seven men. Why have you really come?"

"No special reason. Just wanted to see you all."

But Ta-yung knew something had gone wrong. He stepped out of the cave. Big enemy campfires were blazing on all the surrounding mountains! Where could Chiang-kuo and the thirty others have gone?

Just before dark an enemy detachment had approached from the north to set up a camp on the eastern mountain. When Chiang-kuo, Chang-sheng and the others discovered them, at first they considered getting back to the gorge where Ta-yung and the wounded were hidden. But time was too short. Chiang-kuo had to take the only path that remained open. He led the men through a grove of trees down into a ravine on the opposite side of the mountain.

Ta-yung re-entered the cave, swearing. "Of all the rotten luck! Chuan-yu, get back to your men. Tell them to keep a close watch on the prisoners!"

"Hanging around in this gorge is no good," said Chuan-yu. "If you ask me, we ought to carry the wounded on our backs, herd the prisoners together and make a dash for it!"

"That's easy enough to say. You forget you've only got seven men under you!"

"All the enemy has to do is squeeze down on us from those mountains and they'll flatten us like pancakes!"

Ta-yung punched the earthen wall of the cave. "Flatten us, will they! What's wrong, have the enemy got you scared?" he asked with biting acidity. His concern about Chiang-kuo and the men was making Ta-yung highly irritable. Chuan-yu just happened to be a convenient object on which he could vent his wrath.

Chuan-yu slumped down on his heels and leaned against the wall, his arms resting on his knees. The young fighter's face was twitching; his heart felt as if it were being roasted on a hot griddle.

"Commander," he said, "you and I have been risking our lives together against the enemy for many a month. Just think back. When did you ever see me bat an eye in the face of danger? Scared? I'll tear my heart out and show it to you. . . ." Chuan-yu clutched his head in his hands. "It would be better if the enemy shot me down," he mumbled. "Then I wouldn't have all this aggravation!"

"You're out of your mind!" roared Ta-yung.

Two rifle shots on the mountain top broke the stillness of the night. Then horses whinnied in long shivering cries in a way that chilled a man's heart.

Tense but steady, Ta-yung said, "Even with only one man left we could still make a bloody mark on the enemy thousands, to say nothing of what we can do now with a few dozen bold fighters!" His voice rang like steel in the little cave.

"One or two men make a small target," said Chuan-yu. "You take one of the men and leave. Turn the wounded over to me. I'll stick it out here, come what may!"

"Why should I leave?"

"How could we ever explain to the Party if anything should happen to you? How could we face people?"

Ta-yung laughed coldly. "All you talk about is protecting me. What makes me more precious than anyone else?"

"Your head's wounded . . . you've lost a lot of blood! Anyhow—"

"Anyhow, quit hanging around here, arguing! Get back to those prisoners!"

"I was only thinking—" Chuan-yu began timidly.

"Thinking what?" Ta-yung exploded. "Alright then, stay here! I'll go watch the prisoners!" He stood up, but because he rose too quickly his head swam; stars flew before his eyes. Swaying, he leaned a hand against the wall for support. By the time he recovered, Chuan-yu had scooted out of the cave.

As Chuan-yu was swallowed up in the darkness, Ta-yung regretted he had been so harsh. He wished Chuan-yu were back, close beside him. A man used to leading soldiers is strangely empty when only a few of them are at hand. He feels insecure; he even sleeps poorly.

IX

According to the calendar, summer wasn't quite over yet. But nights along the Great Wall are fearfully cold, and the wind blows rolling clouds of sand.

Ta-yung and the wounded men, tortured by the cold, by hunger and fatigue, by painful wounds, hung on grimly. About midnight, Ta-yung had Little Cheng, the messenger, and San Niu, the young medical orderly, hang a blanket across the entrance of the cave and light one of the captured candles. He went to the stream and filled a kettle with water. He gave each of the wounded a few sips, then left the cave again.

Enemy campfires still burned on the mountain tops. There were rifle shots and the sound of hand grenades on the mountain to the east, and enemy flares and rocket signals rose in the eastern sky. Chiang-kuo and the boys have probably run into the enemy, thought Ta-yung, his heart heavy. One thing was certain—he wouldn't be able to get the wounded and the eighty prisoners out of the gorge tonight.

Beside the stream, he met Chuan-yu, patrolling with a tommy gun. Chuan-yu's clothing was soaked with dew, but his stubborn air gave a lift to Ta-yung's spirits. Ta-yung told him not to let a single prisoner escape. Otherwise their position might be revealed to the enemy.

"No one will get away," Chuan-yu assured him. "Not unless he sprouts wings and flies!"

Ta-yung returned to the cave. San Niu and Little Cheng had disappeared.

The boys wanted to heat some gruel for the wounded and they went out hunting firewood. On the way, they ran into Chuan-yu, who lectured them severely. A fire would practically be telling the enemy where the PLA men were.

Chuan-yu discussed the question of food for the wounded with his men. Then each brought out his last bit of dry ration and turned it over to the two youngsters, instructing them to give it to their injured comrades. Of course, the men said, it was barely enough to get in a fellow's teeth, but it was the best they could offer.

Half an hour later, San Niu and Little Cheng returned to the cave. Little Cheng squatted on his heels without a word. Ta-yung could see that the boys were exhausted and didn't question them.

San Niu produced a few balls of hard tack the size of chicken eggs and divided them among the wounded.

"Where'd you get that?" asked Ta-yung.

"Last night, in the dark—" San Niu began lying.

Little Cheng hastily interrupted. "Chuan-yu's unit just picked it a while ago. Some enemy soldier must have dropped his ration kit when they were crossing the ridge. . . ."

Ta-yung knew the youngsters were fibbing, that the ration was a gift from the other fighters, but he didn't probe any deeper.

"Have you two had anything to eat?" he asked.

"Sure," said Little Cheng. "Plenty!"

"Every spec of it was wonderful," San Niu said. "Delicious! I can still taste it!" He smacked his lips. But as he quietly placed the last two bits of dry ration beside Ta-yung's head, his eyes suddenly went black and he collapsed in a heap. He had fainted from cold, hunger and exhaustion.

Throwing his arms around the boy, Ta-yung cried, "San Niu, San Niu!"

San Niu opened his bright black eyes. They moved wearily. Ta-yung held the two bits of hard tack to the boy's mouth.

"I'm not hungry, commander," protested San Niu. "You eat it. The whole company depends on you!"

Ta-yung hugged him tight and looked at the child's dear face. Tired and hungry, San Niu wore an expression that was much too serious for his fifteen years. Ta-yung wanted to weep.

He got up and walked out of the cave. A crescent moon was gleaming coldly. From the enemy on the mountain tops came sporadic rifle fire. At dawn they'll move on, thought Ta-yung. Then we can cross to the other side of the east mountain, find Chiang-kuo's unit and hurry and catch up with our main forces. They're sure to be around here somewhere.

He wondered what Chiang-kuo and Chang-sheng and the fighters were doing. Crawling through the brush to capture an enemy sentry? Chiang-kuo was sure to be concerned about him and the men. And Chang-sheng —that stubborn ox—he must be fuming!

He went back to the cave. Beset with problems, his nerves were raw. No matter how he tried, he couldn't sleep.

The wounded men, fearing that he would worry about them, clenched their jaws and refused to groan. Only when they were sinking into sleep did involuntary sounds escape their lips.

Huang Shang-ching, very severely wounded, was dying. "Cold! Cold!" he kept saying. Ta-yung wished he could light a fire for him, but it was too risky. He opened his tattered jacket and wrapped it around

Huang, holding him against his chest to warm him. Their hearts beat together. Huang was his soldier, his comrade, his brother. If only one could give part of one's life force to a dying comrade!

Huang moaned feebly. It seemed to Ta-yung that Huang's heart was beating weaker and weaker. A chill spread from Ta-yung's spine into his every vein and nerve. Finished! He put his hand inside Huang's shirt. The soldier's heart was still. Life had quietly departed. Rocking Huang in his arms, Ta-yung called his name. . . . Finished! His back against the earthen wall, he continued to press Huang to his chest. For a long time Ta-yung didn't move. He felt nothing. His brain was blank.

Then the image of Huang leaped into his consciousness, buoyant, vivid, demanding to be sent out with an assault party. . . . At dusk today, Huang's wounds were torturing him and Ta-yung had washed them with salt water. There was no other medication to give. Both of Huang's legs were swollen and purple. Huang knew that he was going to die. "Commander, am I really finished?" he asked. He wanted Ta-yung to take the shirt he was using as a pillow. It was torn, dirty, stained with blood. "It's all I own. Give it to the Party to remember me by . . ." he pleaded, then he buried his face in the shirt and wept.

"I can't. Not yet. . . ." He had never won any high awards in battle, and he certainly wasn't a People's Hero. He hadn't had time to distinguish himself at all. . . . How could he die before. . . .

Ta-yung gently placed Huang's body on the ground. Then he lay down and tried to get some rest.

It was a long night. Swaying the trees in the gorge, the wind blew into the cave. Enemy campfires glowed on the mountain tops. A machine gun chattered in the distance.

To a mind numbed by grief, time moves slowly and heavily.

Little Cheng was deep in slumber, but San Niu squatted silently beside Huang's body. Huang had been closer to him than any of the other soldiers. Huang had often encouraged the boy: "Keep plugging away hard. When you're old enough to join the Party, I'll recommend you." Now he'd never be able to fulfil that promise! Tears ran down San Niu's face, but he didn't dare to weep aloud. The commander got furious at anyone who went soft in the middle of a bitter struggle!

Ta-yung heard the boy weeping and knew what was going on in his mind. San Niu was a stubborn little fighter, but he was only a child after all. Ta-yung looked at the boy and looked at the wounded men. No artillery is rocking the earth, he thought, and there's no clash of bayonets. But here is intense fighting taking a more cruel form, and courage and determination are needed too!

Seated beside the body of Huang, Ta-yung pondered. When his company had marched with the main forces, it was only one small unit in the long line of march. In battle, the company's responsibility was limited

to a certain position in a certain sector. The ideological work in the company was handled by political instructor Wang; above Wang was the battalion commander and battalion political instructor, the regimental commander and the regimental commissar. . . . All the heavy burdens, all the hardships, were their problems. And he, Ta-yung, where did he fit in? In that unified body, he was always unruffled, no matter how difficult the situation, no matter how powerful the enemy. In a word—the Party shouldered all the weighty tasks, on every problem the Party gave concrete leadership. All he personally had to do was attend to his duties properly, keep up with his studies, train his company when they weren't fighting, use his head and give bold direction to the company in battle.

Now he had to carry the whole load himself—all the bitterness, all the hardships. What's more, he knew that the men were thinking: Don't worry. Our company commander will bring us through! . . . And it was right that they should feel this way! But did he actually have any way out?

Brigadier Chen, the regimental political commissar, battalion political instructor Chang Pei, company political instructor Wang Cheng-teh—his dear companion in battle—many clashes, many situations, many people, he could see them all. It was as if the excitement of the past few days had pushed them to the back of his mind and now they had all surged forward again. Yes, without the Party, without the Army, without many many comrades, he would be quite worthless. Very likely he'd have died long ago under the eaves of some house or by the roadside. He had grown up in the great family of the revolution. And what he had learned from various individuals and various circumstances during his life in this great family had given him an inestimable courage. A hot, fiery strength blazed in his chest.

A few of the wounded were conversing in low tones. San Niu and Little Cheng were whispering something too. Ta-yung wanted everyone to share his cheerful confidence.

"In this old cave we only have a visibility of about two feet," he said, "but we want to see further than that. We ought to look at the whole country!" He told them of the victories of the PLA in the northeast, in north and central China, on the central plain; he spoke of the imminent victory of the Northwest Field Army. The complete collapse of the enemy was not far off!

In times of trial, fighters often hark back to earlier struggles, as if seeking in them some clue to the solution of their present difficulties. The wounded begged Ta-yung to tell them one of the episodes of the Long March, when the Red Army trekked 8,000 miles to the Northwest and Yenan.

Ta-yung was willing enough, but for the moment he didn't know where to start. Reviewing the many past struggles in his mind, he recalled

all sorts of details of his personal life. Over ten years of struggle. He had camped out in the rain on mountain tops, he had slept in tall buildings; he had gone through artillery barrages, he had taken part in meetings where he was decorated for valour. . . . War certainly compresses a world of experience into one tight package. Hope, excitement, anxiety, anger, being on the knife edge between life and death—all the feelings that an ordinary man might experience in ten years, in fifty years—a soldier in battle goes through in the course of a few hours. He had stopped hot steel with his cool flesh, and he had won much, laboriously, with bullet and blade. Yes, he had travelled a long way on the path of heroes, and he would go much further along that road in the future. He had wished for many things and he had done many things; hereafter, he would accomplish much more. Right now he was stuck in a mountain cave, aggravated at times to the bursting point, fretting over petty details. But none of that mattered. Only one thing was worth thinking about, and that was fighting boldly for the cause of his class.

Ta-yung's thoughts had nothing to do with death and destruction. His mind travelled far into the future. They would get out of this spot and rejoin the main forces. Countless familiar faces, red flags at a big meeting, perhaps a meeting for giving out awards, Chairman Mao Tse-tung and other members of the Party's Central Committee on the stage. . . . And why not? They've never left us all through the bitter Northwest campaign! A glow suddenly seemed to fill the cave and Ta-yung's body surged with warmth. His thoughts were lofty. He felt young, happy, strong. He could see a wonderful future.

"Start, commander."

"That's right. Anything you talk about is alright with us."

"Comrades," said Ta-yung, "maybe right this minute Chairman Mao and the leaders of the Central Committee are marching through the night. Or maybe they're checking a map in the cave home of some peasant. Comrades, they're with us, no matter how tough things get, personally directing our battles. Just knowing that makes a man happier than he can say. They don't know your names, comrades, and they don't know mine, but they know all about us—that we're suffering in this cave, that we're thinking of them. They're with us, heart to heart! The Party and Chairman Mao have led us in a march all over China. They've taught us to understand many things; they've taught us to understand ourselves. Just think, from the day we were born, hunger and poverty have stalked us like ghosts. Before we joined the revolution we didn't know what we were living in this world for. We had no idea how to use our strength, where to pour out our grievances. How did we know what the source of all our troubles was? Now we've become truly useful men. Comrades, when we think of all that the Party and Chairman Mao have taught us, we know that this bit of trouble we're having here doesn't amount to much.

Grit your teeth, hang on—that's how we'll get through. What can the enemy do to us? We've got the Party and Chairman Mao!"

The men listened breathlessly. They seemed to feel the Central Committee and Chairman Mao right beside them. It was the same as when the PLA was marching through the gorges of northern Shensi, after having evacuated Yenan. Men had said to one another excitedly: "They're just ahead of our regiment! Chairman Mao's there . . . the Central Committee . . . Chairman Mao! . . ." The recollection put fire into the men's hearts. Even the heavily wounded felt they could get up and march. Said one:

"You're right, commander. With the Party and Chairman Mao we'll hold on . . . come what may!"

Listening to the howling of the wind in the endless night, the men imagined that the wind was carrying the news of their plight to the Party and Chairman Mao, to their own main Army forces.

The wounded slept. So did San Niu and Little Cheng. But Ta-yung found sleeping impossible. He got up and walked out of the cave. Raising his head, he looked at the icy stars. A meteor streaked across the sky, then plummeted down, trailing a long bright tail. Ta-yung patrolled outside the cave, went to the bluff beside the river to remind Chuan-yu to keep a careful watch on the prisoners, returned to his pacing in front of the cave.

Toward morning Chuan-yu hurried into the cave to report that enemy soldiers on the eastern mountain were leaving. Ta-yung went out for a look. It was true that most of the enemy were gone from the east mountain, but on the western ridges troops were still advancing in a compact continuous line.

"The hell with them!" said Chuan-yu. "Let's take our wounded and our prisoners and get out! If the enemy attacks, we'll tear into 'em!"

"Wait a little longer," said Ta-yung. "It looks to me as if they'll be off both the east and west mountains before long."

Soon the eastern mountain was free of enemy troops. Ta-yung sent a soldier up to the ridge to scout. A little later, he returned. He said they would still have to wait. The next mountain to the east of the gorge's eastern mountain had enemy troops on it travelling south. The PLA men would have to see how the situation developed, then decide what action to take.

Ta-yung plunged into the cave and threw himself down, breathing hard. He was in a rotten temper. The least thing made him flare into a rage.

X

The sun was pressing down on the western hills. Another day would soon be over.

Ta-yung had not been resting more than five minutes when loud rifle fire, very close at hand, made his hair stand on end. He ran to the entrance of the cave and was greeted by a fierce volley of shots. He pulled back quickly. Bullets knocked off chips of stone, churned the earth. . . .

Almost all the enemy had left the surrounding mountains. But men were constantly deserting, and an enemy platoon, searching for some of the runaways, had come down into the gorge from its northern end. Prying and poking everywhere, they were getting very close to the cave where Ta-yung and the wounded PLA men were concealed. Chuan-yu watched them, his heart at the bursting point. But he had only seven men, and they were guarding more than eighty prisoners. Holding his rifle, he kept his eyes on the enemy. Unless they discovered the cave, he would not fire.

Suddenly, the prisoners began a mad rush in all directions. The enemy platoon started shooting.

At the sound of the firing, the rear guard of the troops passing on the western ridge came charging down into the gorge. . . . Bullets were whizzing thick and fast. . . . Dividing his men into two groups, Chuan-yu sent one of them off with the thirty prisoners that remained. He commanded the other group and covered the withdrawal. Firing as they fell back, Chuan-yu and his men headed east. . . .

An enemy detachment launched a savage assault against the cave.

Ta-yung, Little Cheng, San Niu, and all the wounded who were able to move, met the attack. Throwing grenades, shooting, the enemy shouted:

"Surrender! Surrender!"

"You dogs are blind!" roared Ta-yung. "The PLA never surrenders! Don't you see who we are?"

The battle raged on for ten or fifteen minutes. Smoke covered the sky. Bullets and chips of stone flew through the air. Two of the wounded were killed. Little Cheng and San Niu kept dashing out of the cave to fling grenades at the enemy, then scurrying back to throw themselves prone on the floor of the cave and continue firing. Ta-yung also lay on the ground, using his big pistol. The three weapons were deadly accurate, and the enemy kept their distance.

Because the enemy didn't dare approach the cave, they tied together a large bundle of brushwood, lit it, and dropped it in front of the entrance from the slope above. The leaping flames licked into the cave. Enemy fire was so heavy that a dash from the cave was impossible. Besides, many of the wounded could not move. Ta-yung's mind was racing. If this were the end, he wanted to make the enemy pay dearly for their lives. At the same time, he hoped for a miracle—a sudden rainstorm to put out the flames. . . .

What satisfaction will the enemy get out of killing us? he said to himself. They think they can make us show fear. Bah, what's so frightening about death! In the old society we lived like dogs—hunger, starva-

tion, brutality, could have killed us at any time. Today, after all the things we've accomplished, why can't we die bravely?

He considered bunching together with the wounded and setting off their hand grenades . . . or telling San Niu and Little Cheng to save their last bullets for themselves. But then he seemed to hear someone shouting, "Fight to the end; live to the end!" It was the voice of brigadier Chen, it was the voice of the regimental commissar, it was the voice of political instructor Chang Pei! Immediately Ta-yung realized that for a strong determined man like him to think of death was ridiculous!

"Fight to the end; live to the end!" Ta-yung crawled to the entrance of the cave, firing his pistol. With each shot an enemy fell.

At that moment San Niu and Little Cheng rushed from the cave and tried to shove the fiery pile of brushwood away from the entrance. The two youngsters leaped in and out of the flames, pushing with long sticks. Bullets rained all around them. From the brow of the slope above the cave, the enemy showered the boys with hand grenades. They were enveloped in smoke, flames, bullets, iron fragments. But they stuck to their task with magnificent courage.

Then Little Cheng plunged into the cave, his hat and clothes smoking, his trousers wet with blood. He dropped on one knee and supported himself against the wall, as if afraid of falling.

Still firing, without turning his head Ta-yung asked, "What's wrong, Little Cheng?"

"Don't worry about me, I can hold out! Watch the enemy!"

Bullets spat into the wall above Ta-yung's left shoulder and fragments of rock flew around the cave. One of them cut Ta-yung's forehead. Blood trickled down his face.

"Commander," cried Little Cheng, worried about him, "come over to this side!"

Ta-yung couldn't hear a word. His eyes blazing, he was crawling forward. Little Cheng was frantic. He threw himself on Ta-yung. Ta-yung pushed him aside.

"I'm going after those bastards!"

Again Little Cheng tried to pull Ta-yung back, to protect him with his own body. The commander was the hope, the rock pillar of them all! Suddenly, a bullet went through the clothing beneath Ta-yung's arm into the chest of Little Cheng. The youngster flung up a hand and fell stretched out in front of Ta-yung! . . .

Ta-yung trembled, his heart seared. Throwing his body across Little Cheng, his eyes sought a target.

All he could see was smoke and flames. All he could hear was the roaring fire. Suddenly, he saw San Niu run two steps toward the cave, fall, get up again, then jump back into the blaze. When his clothing began to burn, he rolled on the ground to extinguish the flames. One minute he was pushing the fiery pile of brushwood, the next minute he was picking

up spinning hand grenades and tossing them back at the enemy. Moving with smooth precision, he looked huge, powerful. Ta-yung shouted to him, but he didn't hear.

A rock sent sailing by a bursting grenade struck Ta-yung's head. He leaned dizzily against the wall. His cracked lips were moving, trying to cry, "San Niu, San Niu. . . ."

Night, and limitless peace. It was very cold, but the air was fresh. Ta-yung drew breaths of cold air deep into his lungs. He was completely revived now. He heard someone say, "Commander!"

Ta-yung called for Chiang-kuo, for Chuan-yu, for Chang-sheng. But his shouts weren't audible even to himself. Then he heard voices, voices . . . why, they were the voices of the fighters! Someone was holding water to his mouth. He sipped. How sweet, how refreshing! A big hand was patting his, and there was an arm supporting his head.

"It's me, commander—Chiang-kuo. I'm holding you. I'm right here with you!"

"I'm right here with you,"—the warmest, closest words in the world! Only someone who had been with you through thick and thin could say a thing like that! Ta-yung squeezed Chiang-kuo's big paw of a hand.

"Chiang-kuo," he pleaded, "be quick! Save the men in the cave—the wounded, Little Cheng, San Niu. . . ."

"Rest easy, commander, we got the wounded all out," Chiang-kuo replied. "San Niu is fine. Little Cheng has been badly wounded, but he's in no danger. Commander, commander, answer me, say something, commander!" . . .

Shortly before sunset, Chiang-kuo and his men had crept to the ridge of the eastern mountain, intending to rejoin the men in the gorge. But on reaching the mountain top, they found the cave under fire. A few minutes later, they ran into Chuan-yu and his men. Chiang-kuo left Chang-sheng with one squad to hold the eastern ridge and sent another squad to pin down the enemy on the western ridge. He divided the remaining men between himself and Chuan-yu, and they all went charging down into the gorge. Taken by surprise, the enemy panicked, and before they had a chance to recover from their confusion, while Chuan-yu and his men provided cover from above the cave, Chiang-kuo and his fighters rushed into the cave and rescued Ta-yung and the wounded. . . .

Fighting a rear guard action, the PLA men withdrew rapidly. But it wasn't until dusk that they managed to shake off the enemy.

They continued travelling deeper into the mountains.

Night, unfathomable night.

After the medical orderly finished bandaging his head, Ta-yung got up and leaned on the shoulder of one of the fighters. He insisted on walking, no matter how Chiang-kuo urged that he be carried. Ta-yung

had his creed—however exhausted or seriously wounded a man might be, as long as he could keep erect, he could walk. And if he could walk, he could fight. Besides, said Ta-yung, a couple of little scratches on his head and arm—what did they amount to!

His legs were very wobbly and the first few steps he took were sheer agony. The sweat poured off him. "You can't walk!" a voice inside him whispered. "Nonsense! Of course I can!" another voice retorted. With every step his spirits rose—for every step was a victory over the pain of his wounds, the fatigue of his body. And with heightened spirits came strengthening of will power. A man's will power in battle will permit him to do things at times that astonish even himself. Ta-yung once jumped thirty feet from the top of a city wall, waded across a stream and knocked down two enemy soldiers with the butt of his rifle—all in one breath. Later, when the battle was over, he looked at the wall and laughed in surprise, "In a fight, where does a man get the strength?"

The ground was full of ruts and ridges, and slippery as oil in places. Stumbling along, Ta-yung thought back on the danger they had just come through. There's no such thing as a hopeless situation, he mused. Didn't we fight our way out? No pain, no force can defeat us. . . . Then he remembered Lao-hu. *Ai!* Lao-hu probably was dead! But maybe he too had fought his way through. Possible, very possible. Many miracles happened in battle!

Sorghum leaves rustled in the wind. Crickets called, short and urgent. Stars twinkled like crystal. Night, pervading stillness.

Consciousness returned to Lao-hu. "Where am I?" he wondered hazily, and fainted again. The star-filled sky looked down on his brave struggle, the earth heard his heavy breathing. Lying there, perhaps he had many thoughts and desires. But it seemed that these all would soon be ended.

Two or three hours later, or maybe it was only two or three minutes later, he again revived. "I'm still alive!" he exulted. With an effort, he clutched the life that threatened to leave him at any moment. He tried to move. He was parched, his head ached and whirled. His body was bound with a thousand cords. Needles were stabbing into every one of his pores. A heavy weight was crushing his chest. He couldn't breathe. Blood had soaked the ground beneath him. It was sticky and wet. Cold perspiration ran down his grimy face, ran into his eyes and mouth. He wanted to wipe the sweat away, but his arms were as heavy as logs. Every finger felt like a thick stick. His body was dull, clumsy, paralyzed.

Many exquisite pains had tortured him into wakefulness. His very blood seemed to be oppressing him. He wanted to tear his chest open. Something was burning him all over, turning him numb. He forced himself to think. Weird and peculiar pictures flashed across his mind, floating

disjointed as in a dream. . . . Where was he? Could this be Chenwu Caves? All these people must have come to attend the victory celebration. General Peng Teh-huai was coming toward him, a serious affectionate light in his eyes. General Peng was offering his hand. . . . "Yes, yes, I am Wang Lao-hu. . . ." Then he saw Ta-yung, and the comrades . . . and wasn't that Chuan-yu? See, there was the scar on his face. . . . Warm emotions coursed through Lao-hu. Suddenly he realized—"I'm lying on the battlefield!" He tried to remember the fighting. But his impressions were vague, drifting. He couldn't get hold of them. . . .

Am I here alone? Where are the other comrades? I had something to do with covering a withdrawal. That's right. I bayoneted many enemy. . . . But the comrades? . . . Ah, there's the commander. . . . Lao-hu felt very happy. But then a cold despair settled on him. He was gripped by a terrible fear.

This bold fighter, this hero known for his steadiness, this man of steel, felt a loneliness and fear he had never experienced before. Was it because he was surrounded by corpses? No. It was not the first time he had lain among dead bodies, nor was it the tenth. Was he afraid of dying? No. It was not the first time he had vanquished death, nor was it the tenth. He was frightened because he was separated from the army!

Without the army, without his comrades, how weak a man becomes! thought Lao-hu. The commissar told us once—"Men fight bravely when they're together with their comrades, because at such times they're thinking of everyone's welfare. But let some of these same men be surrounded and cut off by the enemy, and they become powerless. That's because they begin thinking of themselves." Is that the kind of man I am? No, no!

I've got to get out of here!

The will power of courage transcends all pain. Strength seemed to flow back into Lao-hu. He groped for his gun. Where was it? His hand touched a broken rifle butt. He knew every mark on it!

If I can move an inch, I can move a foot, Lao-hu said to himself. If I can move a foot, I can travel ten. . . . Move, move, as long as I can move, I can get out of danger. But every move—what agony! And the burning thirst! Bah! What of it! He looked up at the sky for the north star to give him his bearings. How bright the stars were! But why were the heavens revolving, pulsating?

Lao-hu crawled and crawled. It seemed an interminable time, but he had only travelled three feet. He felt as if he had crawled for miles.

His progress was terribly slow though he was straining tensely with every muscle. After crawling half the night, he came to a patch of sand. It was a little better here—there were no sharp stones and brambles. But in the soft sand, for every two feet he advanced he slipped back one. He remembered the time the army had crossed the desert. *Aiya,* that desert was like a sea, stretching to the horizon. If this desert were just

as wide, he was finished. His heart trembled, but at once he took a grip on himself.

What do I care how big it is? I'm going to keep moving forward, forward!

Suddenly, he observed a dark hazy mass up ahead. It seemed to be rising and falling. Maybe it's men the commander has sent to find me. . . . Scenes of cheerful life in the company vividly recalled themselves to his mind. But why doesn't it move? Maybe it's an enemy sentry. . . . He listened carefully. There was no sound. He circled around to the side of the dark object. Ah, it was only a clump of weeds. Burning with thirst, he dug at the roots for water. Sure enough, he soon reached moist sand. But when he put his mouth to it and sucked, not a drop of water could he extract. Still, the wet sand was delightfully cool against his face!

He wanted to smoke. But his short pipe—where was it? It had been with Lao-hu before he joined the army. It had never left him for a moment, witnessing his every thought and deed. Ah, little friend—what's happened to you?

As soon as he stopped to rest, every fibre and bone in his body felt as if it were splitting with pain. His head swam. Life seemed to be slipping from him. The events of his twenty-nine years flew through his mind.

Lao-hu, a highly skilled mason, after living like a slave under Chiang Kai-shek and Shansi warlord Yen Hsi-shan, became the slave of the Japanese invaders. Was a slave a man? In 1940, he escaped and joined the 120th Division led by Red Army General Ho Lung. He served as a scout. Wounded by a bullet through the chest, he was sent home to recuperate. In his native village, he joined the people's militia. It was then that he fell in love with Jen Tung-mei, chairman of the local women's association. They were inseparable, singing love songs, wandering through the hills, whispering the words that were in their hearts . . . in the shade of the weeping willows beside the stream, talking, talking without end.

In the spring of 1943, just as they were planning their wedding, a sudden enemy attack on their region swept them apart. For a long time Lao-hu had no news of Tung-mei. One night he slipped back to the village but was driven out by a rain of bullets. The Japanese had built a fortified tower in the village. Lao-hu travelled all through the night until he reached the people's district government, concealed in a gorge. There he found Tung-mei again.

She wept on his shoulder. "The enemy burned down houses. You must go back to regular army. It needs every man we can send. If I live, I'll wait for you!"

Today, Tung-mei was twenty-six. She was still waiting for him.

The blood flowed wildly in Lao-hu's veins. The fires of life blazed brighter. Determined to get through, he set his jaw and crawled on.

Sand-laden wind swirled and whistled around him. A heavy mist covered everything. The heavens boomed and roared. Lao-hu closed his eyes. A thick layer of sand clung to his body. Steadily, he continued crawling. He prayed that the wind would not blow him away.

His clothing was soaked with dew. He shivered, and his dizziness left him. He looked up to find the sun high in the sky. The sand was a million shimmering dazzling particles. Could that be crops ahead? He crept forward. The sun was shining hotter by the minute. Lao-hu crawled into a field of sorghum.

Crops. That meant people couldn't be far away. . . . Hope gave him new energy.

The sorghum stalks rustled in the wind, dewdrops rolling from the leaves like tiny crystals. Little birds sang in the fields. The sky was a blue canopy overhead. Ah, how high it was. Whisps of clouds drifted by. Lao-hu wanted to chew the sweet centre of a sorghum stalk. There was moisture in it. Many's the time he'd eaten sweet sorghum pulp as a child! He grasped a stalk with his hands. Ho! Both hands were thickly swollen. The deep gashes the bayonet blade had cut in his palms were filled with sand. His elbows and knees were raw. The sight of them made him weak. Alright, he wouldn't look at them.

The neigh of horses or mules! Then tramping feet. Lao-hu peered through the sorghum stalks. A column of KMT soldiers was marching by. Instinctively he reached for his rifle. Where was it? He hated himself for not having picked up a hand grenade off the battlefield. He couldn't get away and he couldn't defend himself. All he could do was sit there with his eyes wide open waiting to be killed. What a spot for a man to be in! He kept his eyes rivetted on the enemy, all his pain forgotten.

He saw an enemy officer strike a man across the head with a riding crop. He saw soldiers weighed down with heavy equipment, trudging forward, their backs bent like a bow . . . cooks carrying big iron cauldrons . . . pack animals laden with dismantled guns. . . . Suddenly, an enemy soldier plunged into the sorghum, looked around, then ran toward Lao-hu. What should he do? Lao-hu's whole body gave a spasmodic jerk. With bulging eyes he watched the approaching enemy. If he only had a stick! But where could he find a stick here? He wanted to jump up and meet the man in a headlong rush. But he had no command over his exhausted muscles! Good, good! His hand had found a rock.

With this, I'll make him pay a life for a life! he thought. Then he saw that the soldier was in a funk. The man threw down his rifle and stripped off his uniform — revealing civilian clothes underneath — then disappeared like a rabbit into the sorghum. A deserter! Lao-hu was

about to crawl forward and recover the rifle when a man suddenly appeared and snatched it up. At the same moment the man discovered Lao-hu.

The PLA fighter's heart leaped, but immediately he became calm again. The man was a peasant! Lao-hu looked again. There were women crouched in the sorghum, covering their children's mouths with their hands and staring at him in amazement.

"Old countrymen, I'm a PLA . . ." Lao-hu said faintly. The ground seemed to be melting beneath him . . . he was falling into a bottomless gorge . . . the wind whistled in his ears. . . .

XI

Ta-yung and the company crossed two mountains, then followed a stream toward the south. Coming around a bend, they found enemy campfires on the mountain slopes on both sides of the valley. The enemy had lit large bonfires and the mountain tops glowed red.

Escorting more than thirty prisoners and carrying their wounded, the company proceeded quietly. They walked very quickly, but without a sound. Continually, the order was passed down the column—"No talking!" "No smoking!"

The road twisted from a small gully into a large gorge. Now the enemy fires were on all sides. There were some campfires in the gorge, too. Looking at the terrain, Ta-yung was happy. He knew this place. The PLA had passed through here on the way to Yulin. Another two miles to the southeast and they'd be in Michih County—part of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region.

There was a grove of wild date trees in a small mountain pass. Ta-yung led his men into the grove.

"We're going to break out of here," he said to Chang-sheng. "Check the stretchers of the badly wounded. We don't want anything to go wrong in the middle of our move. Every stretcher-bearer must also carry all of his own equipment, so pick only the strongest men."

As Ta-yung finished explaining to the company the plan of action, Chiang-kuo returned from a scouting mission. He had captured an enemy soldier and he was grinning broadly.

"Commander," he said, "the prisoner knows the enemy passwords. Let him take us through. I told him if he doesn't behave I'll slaughter him. That was just to scare him. Then I gave him quite a long political lecture. He swears now his only wish is to 'serve the people'!"

This is the last lap. I've got to bring my men home! thought Ta-yung. He turned to the fighters:

"Comrades, our Border Region is just ahead. Grit your teeth. We're going to break through this final barrier. . . . We'll march one platoon

ahead, one platoon in the rear, stretcher-bearers and prisoners in the middle. Chuan-yu will command the rear guard platoon."

Men tightened their puttees, adjusted their knapsacks, checked their ammunition.

When the company was ready to set out, Chiang-kuo reported, "Commander, two of the wounded have died."

Ta-yung stood stiffly erect in the darkness. He didn't utter a sound, but kept snapping a thick stick into smaller and smaller sections. He bit his lips till the blood ran. Chiang-kuo thought Ta-yung hadn't heard him, and he repeated his announcement.

Ta-yung pointed to a nearby tree. "Bury them over there," he said in a low voice.

Chuan-yu ploughed through his assembled comrades like a madman and pushed up to Ta-yung.

"This is Chiang Kai-shek territory, commander. We want to bury our comrades in our own Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region." He paused for several moments, then said, "Commander, let's carry them back."

The men joined their voices in agreement.

"Commander, I'll carry one!"

"Let me carry one!"

Blood flowed from Ta-yung's heart, tears flowed from his eyes.

"Comrades!" he cried. "Is there a place in all China where the bones of our martyrs aren't buried?" He stamped. "Here, here, bury them right here. Our comrades—one after another, they fall. They die to build a new China! For communism, they give their lives! . . . It doesn't matter where they're buried. No one will ever forget the blood our fighters have shed! No one will ever forget the hardship and pain they have suffered."

Ta-yung's voice was deep, vibrant. "We've endured so much hardship and pain! We've seen so many of our dear comrades fall! We—we're washing China clean with our own blood, we. . . ." Grief filled his broad chest. His heart trembled. But in his mind were sharp clear thoughts. His voice rose fierce and strong:

"War, bitterness, blood, sweat, death—none of them can crush us. . . . Comrades! Not every fighter can live to see the world he's creating with his own hands. But without the blood of heroes, we can't end the misery of class oppression, we can't build a new society. To live for the people and to die for the people—that's all we want."

As the dead comrades were being buried, the fighters wept hot tears. Holding their rifles, they gave a final salute.

Darkness. The hour before dawn when the night is deepest.

The wind, blowing clouds of sand, swaying the trees, howled mournfully. It flapped the clothing of the silent fighters. With a bayonet, Ta-

yung cut a piece of bark off the tree to identify it. We'll come back! he promised the departed comrades.

The fighters wiped the tears from their eyes, the blood from their faces. On their shoulders they bore history's burden, the task their country had entrusted to them, the misery of the people, their own demands for vengeance. They would continue to fight, they would continue to go forward!

Ta-yung's suffering heart cried out for vengeance. Although he couldn't distinguish the fighters clearly in the dark, he could almost see their thin sun-blackened faces, their bleeding feet.

"Forward, march," he said quietly.

Not a man stirred.

"Forward, march!"

The company set out. Chiang-kuo walked with drawn pistol beside the prisoner he had captured. Whenever they were challenged by a guard, the man sang out the password. In this way, the company traversed several small gullies. About three in the morning, they reached a road running through a wide gorge.

The fighters pressed forward at a trot, the shuffling of their feet blending with the rushing of the stream beside the road.

Ahead, at a crossroad, the enemy had built a huge bonfire. When the company was only a few dozen yards from the crossroad, enemy soldiers near the bonfire began shooting at them. Immediately, shots rang out on all sides; flares and signal rockets were set off.

Ta-yung glanced around quickly. The mountains on both sides of the gorge were covered with KMT soldiers. A pistol in one hand, a hand grenade in the other, he gave his command:

"Hand grenades ready! Forward—run!"

They dashed past the crossroad, climbed a mountain, and left the enemy behind.

The sky was quite bright by the time Chuan-yu and his rear guard platoon caught up. The company proceeded openly through a mountain ravine.

For the past few days Ta-yung had said little and his temper was bad. He felt much better now. The company had fought its way through thousands of enemy troops. Battling day and night, they had proven that the enemy was a flop, that the PLA was unbeatable. Ta-yung couldn't have been prouder if he were leading an army of a million heroes. He looked at his men. Their ranks were not so straight as formerly, their feet were dragging and out of step, their uniforms were a mess . . . but everything about them, from their ragged uniforms to their wizened faces and blood soaked bandages, bespoke their courage and their glory.

They had returned to the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia Border Region.

The fighters recognized every tree, every blade of grass. Even the brown bare hills, devoid of any vegetation, they viewed with warm affection.

Birds sang in the trees. A few magpies, trilled, flipped their long tails, then flew directly southeast. The crops were rather poor this year, but how fresh and green they appeared to the PLA men! Waving in the breeze, the crops seemed to be beckoning to them. The waters of the stream were a tumbling muddy yellow. Probably there had been a heavy rain in the upper reaches. Not very deep, the stream flowed swiftly, twisting into large whirlpools, then unfolding and rushing on, tossing up a froth of white bubbles along its edges. On the inundated banks, only the tops of green grass could be seen, struggling in the waves. Weeping willows, their branches trailing in the water, were drenched with leaping froth which dripped back into the stream.

How beautiful were the Border Region's hills and valleys!

Ta-yung unbuttoned his tunic and wiped the sweat from his chest. He sighed comfortably. If the stream weren't so turbid, he would have taken the whole company in for a bath.

Some of the men began to whistle; others sang as they marched. But now that they were back in their Border Region, many of them relaxed. The line of march stretched long, as fighters straggled behind. A few simply sat down to rest.

Ta-yung walked back to two of them. "Keep going, comrades," he said.

"I'm starved, commander," replied Chang Yao-cheng. "I can't go another step. My legs. . . ."

"Commander," said Li Liu-wa, "just look at my feet, my legs, the wound in my chest! . . . I'm worn out, commander. This chest wound. . . . I know I'll never get back to our army. . . ."

Ta-yung's own legs were heavy as lead, and they itched furiously. But, listening to the men, he forgot his pain. His heart went out to them. Supporting Liu-wa by the arm, he said:

"Come on, comrades. I know you. You can march!"

Yao-cheng and Liu-wa marched on.

Limping, Liu-wa winced with every step, and each time he winced Ta-yung's heart contracted with pain. He knew what the boy was suffering.

"I'll carry you, Liu-wa."

"I'm making you tired enough, leaning on you!"

Besides supporting Liu-wa, Ta-yung was also carrying all his equipment. After they had travelled a few hundred yards, Ta-yung was drenched with sweat. At a time like this, even a needle would have felt like a hundred catties.

"Let's rest, commander," Liu-wa urged. "You see, those two comrades have fallen far behind us again."

While Liu-wa squatted by the roadside, Ta-yung signalled the two fighters to catch up. They staggered up and dropped on the ground beside him.

"I'm dead tired, commander!"

"Commander, I can't march, no matter what you say!"

Ta-yung's feet felt as if they were being scalded in boiling water. He took off his shoes. The men caught their breaths at the sight of his soles —cut, swollen, bleeding. He quickly turned around so as not to let the men see.

"Your feet are in terrible shape, commander!" said Liu-wa.

"It's nothing."

"Nothing! About yourself you're always saying—It's nothing!"

Another fighter tore a strip from his tunic. "Commander, let me bandage your feet."

Ta-yung put his shoes on and stood up. "We're fighting a revolution," he said. "How can we win it if we don't shed a little sweat and blood? Give me your equipment, comrades, and let's be going. We mustn't fall behind."

The fighters scrambled to their feet. One of them supported Liu-wa.

"March on, commander. As long as there's a breath left in our bodies, we'll go with you to the ends of the earth!" The men continued forward.

Not far ahead, they suddenly observed four women carrying something. A few children with water jugs trailed in the rear. When the children noticed Ta-yung and his men approaching, they ran, shouting, toward the women, who immediately hurried into a ravine.

Suspicious, Ta-yung trotted ahead to have a look. The women were standing together, but the object they had been carrying had disappeared. Ta-yung hailed them:

"What are you womenfolk doing out here?"

The women stared at his filthy uniform, caked with blood and grime.

"What are you looking at? I'm a member of our army!"

A middle-aged woman came forward a few steps. "Are you really? . . ."

"Of course, I am! Don't you see this grey uniform?"

The women crowded around him affectionately. One of them wept:

"*Aiya*, the big gorge over there is full of enemy troops down from Yulin! . . ."

The middle-aged woman said, "Comrade, we've got one of our wounded here!"

Startled, Ta-yung ran over to see. There in the tall grass, lying on a wooden door, was a wounded soldier. His face was swollen and waxy; there was blood on his chin and neck. But his closed eyelids seemed to smile. Ta-yung dropped on his knees and embraced him. Cheek to cheek, he cried:

"Lao-hu! Lao-hu!"

Lao-hu was not able to reply.

Ta-yung put his hand under Lao-hu's clothing. The wounded man's heart was beating firmly. But there seemed to be something on his stomach. Ta-yung opened the clothing and looked. Lao-hu was wrapped in strips of cloth, beneath which there seemed to be some kind of soft lumpy objects.

"This comrade was brought to my house," the middle-aged woman explained. "He told me to smear his wounds with the pulp of pumpkin. He said he cured wounds many times that way during the war against the Japanese! I did what he asked. . . ."

"How did he get to your place?"

"We live about seven miles northeast of here," another woman said. "Right on the border between the Red and the White areas. Last night at the first cock's crow, five or six peasants from the White area carried him in. 'We've been travelling all day and all night,' they said. 'Can you get him back to our army?' Hmph! 'We don't belong in this Red area if we can't!' I told him. . . ."

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

NOT UP TO STANDARD

Nan Ting

Yeh Ying carried a letter of introduction from the machine-tool shop of the textile machinery works as she entered the office of the foreman of Section Two. The foreman was out. A young clerk was poring over some charts, frowning at the dizzy array of figures. Evidently having finished his calculations, he pushed the charts aside and began examining another batch. Finally, with a long sigh he raised his head and noticed Yeh Ying.

"What's on your mind, comrade?" he asked.

"I'm looking for the section foreman."

"The foreman?"

"I've been transferred to this section. I'm the new checker."

The young man glanced at her sharply. She was very pretty, he observed. Her large black eyes were clear and deep—those of a thoughtful person. The bridge of her nose was a little flat though, just a trifle. And those thin lips—a sure sign that she was one of those girls who never gave an inch. Scowling, the young man returned to his charts.

Yeh Ying had a fairly good notion of why the young clerk had looked at her so hard when she said she was a checker. They had told her something about Section Two in the Checking Department and in Personnel. Chao Teh, the foreman, she knew still better. He and her father were old friends. They had been workers together for over ten years. Up to the time she entered the technical training school the year before, Yeh Ying had always called him "Uncle Chao." She hadn't seen him since her return.

Section Two's last checker—also a girl—had wept and asked to be transferred. She said it was impossible to work as a checker in Section Two. Disagreements between workers and checkers were not uncommon anywhere, but in Section Two they seemed particularly frequent. Yeh Ying heard that the last checker had rejected some parts as not being up to standard and the workers had appealed against her decision to the Checking Department. On re-examination the Checking Department had found that a few of the rejects could be passed. Thereafter the girl's relations with the workers went from bad to worse; now Yeh Ying was being sent to replace her.

Tired of standing in silence, Yeh Ying seated herself at the foreman's desk and idly turned through a few charts. They were covered with oily fingerprints.

"I suppose the foreman's not very fond of checkers?" she asked with studied casualness.

The young man cocked his head to one side and eyed Yeh Ying.

"Hard to say," he replied without stopping his work. "Our foreman is a fine man."

"Oh?"

"Fine. Tall. Built like a small mountain. Scares the life out of people sometimes, but after you've been here a while you'll get to know him—as warm-hearted as they come! Blows up like a volcano when he gets mad, but don't let that worry you. The next minute he's all calm seas and gentle breezes."

The young man's pen scratched noisily as he completed another chart. With a sigh he rose and poured out a glass of water. "Rest a minute," he said to himself. After finishing the glass he went back to his charts.

"Our foreman played a big part in preventing the Kuomintang destroying this place just before it was liberated," the clerk continued. "Used to be a top-notch lathe operator. You'll understand everything after you've been here a couple of days. . . ."

"I know," said Yeh Ying. When the young man gazed at her inquiringly she added with special emphasis, "He and I are old pals."

Looking at the girl's childish, oval face, the clerk couldn't repress a chuckle. Yeh Ying laughed too.

The office door was flung open and the roar of the machines surged into the room. Chao Teh stood in the doorway like a small mountain, his entire body exuding strength, his chest and brawny arms practically bursting with vitality. There was a tipsy fire in his piercing eyes, as if he had just downed several cups. Actually he seldom touched liquor.

To Yeh Ying he was still the same Uncle Chao, but she noticed that grey hairs were beginning to sprinkle that large head above the massive shoulders.

Chao Teh hesitated, then burst into booming laughter.

"I thought I'd been fired and that they'd sent a woman foreman to take over! Instead I find you, little imp! Just get back?" He placed his great hand on her head familiarly and pushed her into her seat. Sweeping the charts on his desk into a pile, he sat down opposite Yeh Ying and squinted at her.

"How do I look?" he demanded. "Your uncle's lost a lot of weight this past year."

"Same as ever—full of pepper!"

Chao Teh shook his head. "Haven't forgotten how to soft-soap me, eh? No, minx, I'm old and grey. 'The pearl has yellowed.'"

Yeh Ying wanted to giggle. The phrase was ordinarily used to describe the faded beauty of a once lovely woman.

"Ever since your uncle was given this blasted foreman's job, he's caught nothing but hell from all sides," Chao Teh said. "I don't know why they don't fire me and be done with it. If I could get back to my lathe I guarantee I could satisfy everyone. I've still got these." He held out a pair of heavy hands that hadn't lost their calluses.

Chao Teh's thick fingers turned awkwardly through a few of the day's reports. "Production rate, production rate," he muttered. "Damn the thing! The closer you stick to your rate, the more fault the checker finds. Re-do this, scrap that. Easy enough for her to scrawl her little red and yellow marks. Oh, the leadership criticizes you for not fulfilling your quota, the checker says your stuff isn't up to standard. I tell you, minx, your uncle is being squeezed from above and below. They're making mincemeat out of him. . . ."

He glanced at the calendar. It still showed yesterday's date. Rising to his feet, he ripped the sheet off, tore it to bits and threw it in the waste-paper basket. Then he lit a cigarette and exhaled a great breath of smoke, enveloping Yeh Ying. She nearly choked. Originally she had intended to talk to him immediately about her job, but when she heard with what annoyance he mentioned the checker she decided to hear a little more first.

The young clerk looked at Yeh Ying shrewdly, then picked up his charts and went into the workshop.

Puffing vigorously at his cigarette, Chao Teh continued to complain. "We're in the last ten days of the month now. Got to keep up production, hold up our end of the contract with the other sections — it's enough to break your back! And that checker—just a snip of a girl, mind you!—always picking away. Quality, quality, quality all day long. You'd think she was only one in the whole wide world who understood what the word meant. I was a worker long before she could say 'Mama!' But all she did was complain about quality. . . ."

Chao Teh flung his hand down in a gesture of disgust. The swish of his huge paw stirred up a breeze.

"What's the use of talking," he said. "The minute you come your uncle pours out all his troubles. I haven't even asked you where you're working now. Are you still in your papa's section? Section Five is doing pretty well. Your old man is really ploughing right ahead. Everybody's talking about him."

Yeh Ying handed him her letter of introduction. "I'm not in Section Five, Uncle. I've been sent here."

Chao Teh took the letter and dropped it on his desk without reading it.

"Good. So the machine shop finally granted my request. We need people badly. You've had a year's training. You'll be as skilled as your old uncle soon. Ha, ha! We've got a brand-new Czech lathe I can put

WU TSO-JEN: Portrait of Chi Pai-shih

you on. You'll see. Your uncle will treat you right. I promise you won't be any the worse for coming to Section Two."

Yeh Ying shook her head.

"I've got a new job, Uncle. I don't work a lathe any more."

Startled, Chao Teh picked up the letter. It said: "Your present checker had been transferred to another section. Yeh Ying will take her place. . . ." Chao Teh's big hand flattened the letter on the desk. His tipsy look pierced Yeh Ying. Returning his gaze with large clear eyes, she waited to hear what he would say. Chao Teh looked away and stood up.

"Whose idea was this? Checker. Why should they make a checker out of you? Checking is a petty, fault-finding job. And you—little Ying—you're a really good lathe operator, you have a future in it. Why do they want you to mess around with checking?"

Yeh Ying stood up too. She wasn't going to let anyone insult her occupation. There was an excited flush on her face.

"You're wrong, Uncle. Checking isn't petty and fault-finding. It's a guarantee of quality."

Chao Teh spread his hands wide and sat down. He knew her temperament. Besides, it would be ridiculous for an uncle to quarrel with a little girl. Recalling how he had just reviled checking without realizing that the checker was sitting right in front of him, Chao Teh grinned in spite of himself. He dropped his cigarette and ground it out beneath his heel.

"When do you want to start?"

"Immediately, comrade foreman."

Yeh Ying's formal correctness tickled Chao Teh. His mind was still full of recollections of her as a child.

"Your uncle has been sniped at plenty," he said. "Plenty of mud has been slung at him too. A few more blobs from you and I'll be all made up to sing the black-faced villain in the opera. Seriously, little Ying, I trust you. You've run machinery yourself. You won't be a finicky fussbudget, always trying to catch your uncle by the short hairs."

"I certainly will do my work conscientiously, comrade foreman."

"Cut out that 'comrade foreman' stuff! I'm not used to silly ceremony. And let me tell you, little Ying, you've heard some swearing in your time, but if you snipe at me you'd better look out for this." Chao Teh waved his huge fist in the girl's face.

Yeh Ying hastily drew back, as if in fear that the big fist would actually land on her nose. Realizing that he was putting his case too strongly, Chao Teh changed his tone.

"I'm glad you've come," he said. "We're more than ordinary friends. We'll be able to help one another. . . . If you run into any difficulty, speak right up!"

In the workshop, Yeh Ying took a deep breath of the oil-laden air and looked over the section. It was divided into two rows of different sized machines, all humming and buzzing in a sea of sound. Men, concentrating on their work, were operating the machines. As Yeh Ying approached, one of them made a funny grimace. Somehow she felt it had something to do with her. Just as she squatted to examine a pile of finished parts, a red light glowed and the whistle blew. It was five o'clock—quitting time.

Many of the workers were no better than Foreman Chao Teh as far as checkers were concerned. They had all kinds of prejudices. A day or two later, as Yeh Ying was busy checking, a young worker passed by. He discovered that out of sixty parts he had machined she had marked two-thirds either to re-do or to be scrapped. Keeping his voice calm only with the greatest effort, he said:

"Comrade checker, I request that you examine those parts again." He pointed at the piles marked with red and yellow paint.

Yeh Ying was amused by the young man's forced courtesy. But the angry set of his mouth gave him away. Yeh Ying could sense a challenge and she prepared to meet it. With equal courtesy, she replied:

"I've checked quite carefully, comrade."

"I request that you examine them again, comrade," the young lathe operator repeated with added emphasis.

"It's not necessary, comrade," said Yeh Ying. "The micrometer doesn't lie."

"Examine them again!" the young man burst out furiously.

Yeh Ying cast a startled glance at his angry face. Then she continued with her checking. Her silence proved a goad to the young man's rage.

"I don't accept your findings," he yelled. "Better checkers than you have passed my work. Who do you think you are—pecking at trifles. I don't agree and what are you going to do about it?" He strode away, muttering something about ". . . that little flat nose!"

Yeh Ying fought to hold herself under control. She didn't want to quarrel when she was so new on the job, but she couldn't take this lying down. Her lips formed a straight line and she walked over to where the young man was tending his spinning lathe. All eyes were upon her. She stood and looked him straight in the eye.

"Don't you know what responsibility to your job means?" she demanded in a voice that trembled slightly. "You put out faulty work and waste the country's money and then shout and yell as if you were covered with glory. That's not glorious, comrade. It's shameful!"

The young man's face went purple and his mouth twitched. But Yeh Ying's sudden attack had rendered him speechless. The girl turned and walked away.

At home that night, she sat motionless beside the table for a long time, thinking of the day's events. Unconsciously her hand tightened into a fist and drummed lightly on the tabletop. Finally she took up her diary and wrote:

October 26, 1953

I'm not afraid, I'm going to do my job according to my conscience as a Youth Leaguer. It's my duty to "find fault" and not let faulty products get by. . . .

She tossed and turned for hours that night, unable to sleep. I have a hard job, she thought, but there's no problem in this world that can't be licked. . . .

Word of the quarrel between Section Two's new checker and the young lathe operator reached Tang Liang, secretary of the Communist Party branch in the machine-tool shop. He had been keeping an eye on Chao Teh's section for some time, but had been very occupied with his work in Section Five. Now he felt it absolutely imperative to have a look at Section Two.

After making a round of the section, he went to the foreman's office and found Chao Teh examining charts. After some general discussion, Tang Liang came to the point. He criticized the section's low level of political understanding, reminding Chao that it was squabbles with the workers which had driven away the last checker; and now the same sort of thing was starting again with the new one. He said the foreman ought to find out who was in the right and who was wrong and settle the matter.

Chao Teh had just returned from a meeting of shop officials where he had been hauled over the coals, and he was full of resentment. Being censured by Tang Liang too was the last straw.

"I'm sick of all this harping on my faults," he said. "Why don't you people ever look at my past record? Didn't I risk my life to save the factory? Wasn't I a first-rate lathe operator? And what about now? I'm not lazy. I work till my eyes are bloodshot. This past year I've got a lot more grey hairs. But nobody talks about that. All I get is reprimands. I'm fed up."

Tang Liang let him finish and waited a moment before replying.

"We all know about your past record. It's because of your past record that the Party recommended you for a foreman's job. You have an excellent record and nobody's denying it. But you have to meet your present responsibilities. Shortcomings in your work must be recognized too—and criticized. You were a fine lathe operator once, Comrade Chao. You ought to be just as fine a section foreman."

"A fine section foreman. . . . Impossible! . . ."

Before Chao Teh could say more, a team leader came for him, and the two hurried out to the workshop.

That ended the conversation. Tang Liang made another round of the section, stopping here and there to chat, then returned to his office. He paced the floor, pondering. Years of political work in the army enabled him to analyze pretty well what was on a man's mind. Chao Teh, mused Tang Liang, really didn't have anything to be proud of at present. He couldn't fulfil his quota, his section turned out a great many unusable parts, he was constantly being criticized. Yet Chao Teh was quite satisfied with himself. The basis of his pride was his "past record." He was always looking back, resting on his laurels, and that was preventing him from going forward. Of course no one could say that Chao Teh was lazy. But his thinking was lazy, stalled, dulled to the new developments all around him. He had become backward and conservative, unable to keep up with the times.

Through the glass pane in his window, Tang Liang could see Section Five on the floor below. The section foreman was talking to a worker and pointing at something in one of the machines. A man's ideas drive forward just like a machine, thought Tang Liang, quickly and steadily, except that sometimes something blocks their advance. A good lathe operator can find what is jamming his machine and promptly set it moving again. In the same way a good Party worker ought to be able to rouse a man from his lethargy and set him back on the path to progress. It wasn't enough simply to criticize Chao Teh; he needed real help. Tang Liang decided to have another talk with him.

Yeh Ying was very exacting in her examination of the machined parts. Once or twice workers appealed against her findings. But each time the Checking Department re-examined the parts in question it confirmed her judgment. The workers could find no weaknesses in her. She was tough, merciless in her insistence that the work must be up to standard.

The nearer the end of the month drew, the more frantic Chao Teh became. He couldn't complete his quota, the production rate was sagging and the number of rejects was increasing. He was sure to get another reprimand.

One day he approached Yeh Ying as she was painting yellow stripes on some rejected parts. Annoyed, Chao Teh shook his head.

"You're doing very well at a hard job, little Ying," he said sarcastically.

"Things look bad, Uncle Foreman," she replied. "You've got to do something about this."

"Do something? . . . Humph, you checkers, afraid you'll be out of a job if you can't find a lot of rejects. Production rate, rejects. . . . All good for nothing." Muttering, he walked away.

Yeh Ying stared after his burly figure. She saw him go up to a worker and burst into a rage. His roars could be heard all over the section, almost drowning out the noise of the machinery. Yeh Ying recalled what the young clerk had said that first day about Chao Teh blowing up like a volcano.

Everything displeased Chao Teh—the hum of the machines, the manner in which they were placed, the shrill hoot of the factory whistle, and especially the pile of charts that appeared on his desk every day. The figures made his head spin, they put his heart into a turmoil. Back in his office, he sighed every time he examined a new chart.

Of course the production of rejects couldn't be forgiven but, according to Chao Teh, there were some circumstances beyond his control. They had just started to make parts of a new type. There was nothing strange about producing more rejects than usual. It wasn't that he hadn't given any thought to the rejects, it wasn't that they didn't make him feel bad. But production rate, quota . . . crushed him till he couldn't catch his breath. The machine shop demanded that he maintain the rate of production and gave him the dickens for being a drag on the shop's quota. The assembly shop held out its hands and demanded machined parts. As Chao Teh put it—they were flattening him. He castigated for having no sense of planning any team or individual worker who lagged. Actually, that was the very criticism his superiors were always levelling at him. Receive a reprimand and pass it on—but the problem still remained. Rejects—triple-damned rejects! Stirred by his section's traditional prejudice against checkers, he thought of Yeh Ying. He sent someone to fetch her.

There wasn't really anything that Chao Teh wanted to tell Yeh Ying. He sat silently puffing his cigarette when she came in. She watched the morose foreman curiously, trying to fathom what was going on in his mind. His head enveloped in a cloud of smoke, at the moment Chao Teh himself couldn't have told what he was thinking.

Finally, Yeh Ying could restrain herself no longer.

"What's up, Uncle?" she asked.

Chao Teh took a few more drags at his cigarette. "Have you seen our monthly report?" he countered slowly.

"I've seen it, Uncle."

The foreman threw his half-burned cigarette to the cement floor and let it smoulder. He paced to and fro a few times. Then, as if exhausted, he again sat down at his desk and pushed a pile of charts away from him with abhorrence. He beat his forehead with a thick finger (a habit he never had before) and looked at Yeh Ying. But what was there to say?

The piercing gleam had gone out of his eyes. It was as if the flame within him had been extinguished. He rose and stood wavering. Suddenly he was gripped by an angry frustration.

"Checkers do their jobs to the letter," he shouted. "They can be proud, very proud! But our section, our section foreman, what about them? A reject section, a reject foreman! Everybody blames us! . . ."

Unable to go on, Chao Teh slumped into his chair.

"I don't understand," Yeh Ying prodded him. "What do you mean?"

"Little Ying, I'm ready to take responsibility for not keeping up to rate, for turning out rejects. But. . . ."

"But what?"

"Well, the workers are complaining about you. . . ."

"What do they say?"

"It's all very well to do your job in a responsible way. I don't object to that. But the workers say you're too rigid. Parts that ought to be passed. . . ." Chao Teh trailed off lamely.

Originally Yeh Ying had been intending to help this uncle of hers, to lighten his burden, say something to cheer him up. But suddenly he had revealed his weakness. He had tried to cast the blame for the rejects on her own head. Furious, she stood up.

"Right," she snapped. "I am rigid! But just show me any part that I rejected wrongly."

Chao Teh didn't reply.

"I really don't know what you can be thinking," she continued. "Am I to be slipshod and let faulty parts get by? I can never do that, comrade foreman."

Chao Teh leaped to his feet. "What kind of stupid talk is that! . . ."

But Yeh Ying was walking away. "Excuse me," she said, "I'm busy."

The foreman shouted for her to come back. The door of the office opened briefly, letting in the clatter of the machinery, then slammed firmly shut.

As Chao Teh stood rigid, Yeh Ying abruptly re-appeared, poking her head in through the door. The foreman looked at her in bewilderment. Yeh Ying fixed her luminous eyes on him and said:

"You shouldn't go shouting and roaring all over the place. You ought to consider your work coolly from every angle. And first think about yourself, your methods. Losing your temper won't cut down rejects. Losing your temper won't increase the production rate. Losing your temper doesn't solve anything."

Chao Teh sat down weakly and gripped his temples. His head was splitting. He groaned inwardly. Even infants were reprimanding him now.

A few days before, Yeh Ying had felt pretty proud of her work. She had been doing her job firmly and conscientiously. I'm a member of the Youth League, she had often said to herself, and I must be just as good a checker as I was a lathe operator.

Lately, however, something began to trouble her and drove out completely her budding vainglory. In fact she felt quite annoyed with herself.

What disturbed her was the question of "duty." Of course, the duty of a checker is to examine carefully, she thought, to prevent faulty parts from moving into the next section. If the parts were assembled into complete machines, that would incur the additional expense of dismantling and re-doing—if the flaws were spotted before the machines left the factory. Otherwise they would just be putting out sub-standard machines. The young lathe operator (the one who had called her little flat nose) had said she was just a fault-finder. That was true, but the faults she found were real ones. Still, was just finding faults enough? Why couldn't she help Section Two? Why couldn't she help her Uncle Chao? She was rather sorry she had spoken to him so harshly. Could she, for instance, help cut down on the number of rejects? These questions worried Yeh Ying.

The work demanded a great deal of her and she was dissatisfied with her performance. Troubled, she spoke little, not at all like her usual lively self. People were surprised and her father was concerned about her. Tang Liang had also noted her moodiness.

The evening after her quarrel with Chao Teh, Yeh Ying sat silently by the table at home. Her face was somewhat thinner. In the pale glow of the dim electric bulb, her eyes stared vacantly into space. Her father looked at her uneasily.

Yeh Ying's mother had died ten years before, her brother was working in a factory in the Northeast. The girl was the only one Papa had left and he had raised her lovingly, with more than the usual father's affection. What's more, he had made quite a competent lathe operator out of her. Exacting in his demands on himself, he had not been lax with his daughter.

Putting down his *Workers' Daily*, he asked her, "Is anything wrong, little Ying?"

Yeh Ying started. "I was thinking, Papa."

"I'm afraid you've been thinking too much. You're eating less and you don't say very much. And you've lost weight, too. Let me hear what you've been thinking so much about." He stood up and lightly stroked the girl's hair.

"Papa," said Yeh Ying softly, "I haven't been doing enough. Look at those girls in factories all over the country who get honoured as model workers. They're not any older than me, but they've already done so much for our country. What have I got to show? It makes me feel bad when I compare myself with them."

Surprised and pleased, Ying's father tilted her chin a trifle and looked into her eyes. She's grown so quickly, he mused. Smiling, he paced the floor.

"You're right, you're right, little Ying," he said approvingly. "That's something you should give a lot of thought to. But have you figured out what to do about it?"

The girl evaded his gaze and shook her head. "No."

"Well, keep thinking then. You must find a solution."

Yeh Ying looked at her father's grey hairs, the wrinkles on his forehead and at the corners of his eyes.

"Papa," she said in the same low voice, "you know Section Two is turning out a lot of rejects and we can't fulfil our quota. I used to think that didn't have anything to do with me, that I was doing everything I could possibly do by being a good checker. But now I know I haven't done everything I could. I can do much more. For instance, I ought to think of a way to cut down Section Two's rejects. . . ."

The girl shook her head unhappily. "The trick is to find a real method. . . . Papa, can you help me?"

Her father laughed. "Sure. Let's think it over together and see who can find an answer first."

Yeh Ying smoothed her hair into place. Then her eyes sparkled.

"Papa, Papa," she cried, so excited she could hardly get her words out straight, "I've got it! I've got it! What do you think of this: When a worker starts a new batch I examine the very first piece he finished and tell him what's wrong with it. . . . You know, Papa, actually only a few workers turn out faulty parts regularly. Like old An Ta-fang on the boring machine. He's always making the holes a little too big. If I could check the first part he drills and tell him: It's a bit too large, could you please make the next one a little smaller? Papa, what do you think?"

"So you've found an answer first after all. It's a good method," said her father, his eyes shining with encouragement, "an excellent method. It will be very helpful to Section Two and definitely cut down its rejects. But you just said—'a bit too large. . . .' How much is a bit? A checker has to speak with scientific accuracy."

Yeh Ying was her bubbling self again. She rushed up and shook her father by the shoulders. "That's only a for-instance, Papa. Papa, that's how we'll do it!"

But her father merely picked up his newspaper, shook his head and sighed lightly. Ying stared at him.

"What's the matter, Papa," she demanded agitatedly. "Don't you approve?"

He stood up and patted her hand. "It's all right. You do it that way." He returned to his chair. "I've been thinking too. The real key to Section Two's problems is Chao Teh. The shop leaders understand the situation in Section Two. I know something about it myself. Chao Teh and I are old friends, but I've never talked with him about it and tried to help him out. The other day Comrade Tang Liang asked me to find time to chat with old Chao. . . . I used to think the same as you. As long as I

ran my own Section Five well I thought I was doing my share of the job. I wasn't much interested in what was happening in other sections. You see, my ideas were more backward than yours."

Yeh Ying's father looked at her. Her eyes were glowing with loving admiration.

"I must go and see old Chao," he continued. "All those years working together, all the hard times we've been through together. Now we're both section foremen, not working for any boss but for ourselves. But old Chao. . . ."

Yeh Ying nodded her head in agreement.

She approached An Ta-fang's work bench to examine the first part the old man had drilled. An Ta-fang disliked checkers generally and girl checkers in particular. Instead of always coming around snooping, these young wenches would be better off at home raising kids, he snorted to himself.

Yeh Ying completed her check. "It's a sixty-fourth out," she said in a friendly tone. "Please watch the next one."

The result was not what Yeh Ying had anticipated. No checker had ever dared to find fault with An Ta-fang's work right under his nose, but this little snip. . . . He switched off his machine, wiped his hands on some cotton waste and, without even a glance at Yeh Ying, said:

"I'm not good enough. You run the machine." He walked away to the foreman's office.

Yeh Ying had never received such a rebuff. All the machines in the section were running steadily. Only the one boring machine was silent, as if it had suddenly gone dead. With a helpless feeling, the girl stood perplexed.

Just then, the door of the foreman's office opened. Through the noise of the machinery, indistinctly she could hear a voice saying, "I'll quit. I won't take any sauciness from that little chit. . . ."

The mountainous foreman emerged and came up to Yeh Ying. His brilliant eyes had lost much of their lustre. He spoke to her in a tone he had never used before.

"Comrade Yeh Ying, return to your place. I don't want you going to the benches. Otherwise I'll have to hold you responsible for any drop in production. . . ."

Without waiting for him to finish, Yeh Ying promptly returned to her "place" in the corner of the section. She was much aggrieved and very dissatisfied with Chao Teh. What could she possibly say to him? Meaning well, she had tried to help Section Two—and was doused with one bucket of cold water after another. Yeh Ying wanted to cry, but she managed to hold back her tears.

When she returned home that night, her father was preparing to leave for the evening technical class he ran for the workers. Not noticing Yeh Ying's unhappy expression he said:

"That idea of yours is very good. We've introduced it in Section Five. The workers like it. It's really getting results."

Yeh Ying was anxious to speak to him but he hurried off to class.

She lay down on her bed without turning on the light. "What shall I do?" she asked herself softly.

Many questions troubled her. Am I meddling in things that don't concern me?... Was I wrong today?... Why should I stir things up and make people angry?... Why don't I just stick to checking in the usual way?... Checker, checker, what is a checker anyhow?... If I had a foreman like Papa everything would be fine....

But what am I going to do? Again she returned to the crucial question. Her large eyes stared into the darkness, her mind numb. Then the recollection of what her father had said shook her out of her lethargy —Section Five was already using her method!

Yeh Ying stood up. "H'm, and I was almost ready to give in!" She rushed out to find Tang Liang.

After listening to Yeh Ying, Tang Liang was convinced that the problem in Section Two was not rate of production but quality of production. He decided to speak to Chao Teh in the morning.

He could see the entire plant as he came down the stairs from his third floor office. It looked handsome and powerful in the night. Among the workers who had risked their lives to save it from the retreating Kuomintang had been Chao Teh and Yeh Ying's father. They had acted valiantly. But life moves on, and we must move with it. Of course it's all a question of outlook, reflected Tang Liang, like the difference between Yeh Ying and Chao Teh. One wants to keep pushing ahead and demands a great deal of herself. The other is always looking back to his "glorious" past and forgets that he's still travelling, forgets where he's going.... The masters of life are the ones who march in its vanguard. Chao Teh had been there once, but now he had fallen behind.

The next day was Sunday and Tang Liang rose early, as was his habit, and pinned on his Huai Hai campaign medal. Tang Liang cherished the memory of his more than ten years in the revolutionary army and retained the alertness and forthrightness of a soldier. His army job as a political worker had deepened his thinking and sharpened his perceptions. He had the typical political worker's easy jocular manner.

Tang Liang invited Chao Teh to his quarters. The foreman came and sat on a chair beside the window, not saying a word. Tang Liang poured him a cup of strong tea.

"I hope you're not angry with me, Comrade Chao," said Tang Liang. "We're not here to criticize anyone. There's been enough of that sort of thing already. I just want to talk to you about things in general."

Chao Teh glanced at the energetic Party secretary, then again averted his eyes.

Tang Liang handed him a cigarette and lit it. Chao Teh smiled listlessly.

"You're much thinner lately," said Tang Liang, sitting down on the opposite side of the table. "You ought to look after your health. You've got a tough job, running a section. You're not just operating a lot of dead machinery, you're leading living people."

Chao Teh had been expecting to be criticized, and these words took him by surprise. He didn't know what to say.

Tang Liang walked to the window and stood beside Chao Teh. He pointed at the construction site beyond the grounds of the machinery works where a new textile factory was rising.

"Look, old Chao."

Chao Teh rose to his feet and stood beside the secretary.

"That's going to be our first national textile factory," said Tang Liang in a moved voice. "Next year and the year after we'll build the second and the third. Our city will become a textile centre. What a sight, old Chao. Where else in the world do they build industries as quickly as we!"

"It's certainly fast," said Chao Teh, equally moved.

"The hands stretched out to us for machinery are increasing. There will be more of them every year. Give us textile machinery—spinning machines, looms—we want all kinds, we want good ones, we want a lot of them," Tang Liang said half to himself, "and we here...." He looked at Chao Teh.

The foreman had been listening, carried away, and when Tang Liang suddenly stopped Chao Teh turned to him. Tang Liang smiled.

"Suppose you were those textile mills, old Chao, and I was our machinery works. You ask me for a lot of all kinds of good textile machinery. But I say—Sorry old man, you're in too much of a hurry. We can only give you a bit, not very good stuff either. What would you say to that?"

Chao Teh knew what Tang Liang was referring to. He shook his head. Tang Liang laughed.

"The textile mills shake their head. That means production on those lines won't do. Right?"

Chao Teh nodded. "Right. It won't do!"

Tang Liang opened the window, letting in the sunlight and fresh air.

"Unfortunately, you're not really a textile mill. You, and I, make machinery for textile mills. Like that one over there."

Both glanced at the building site. A hawk wheeled slowly overhead. It was an impressive picture. The two looked for a long time in silence.

Tang Liang was the first to recover himself. He invited Chao to be seated, then sat down himself in his original chair.

"Yes, we're fast. What kind of a working class, what kind of a Communist Party would we be if we weren't fast?" said Tang Liang. "You know, old Chao, when I think of our industry it makes me both happy and scared. Why I'm happy is obvious. What scares me is that I'm afraid I can't keep up. I don't know anything about industry. When they told me I was going to work here, I pleaded for a chance to go to an industrial school first. Learn while you work, they said. Well, here I am. But I'm an amateur, I don't know any of the tricks of the trade. Could you give me some ideas on what I and the shop chief do wrong?"

The secretary grinned. "Here we go, criticizing again, but what can you do? Only today, for a change, you tell me and the shop chief off. I guarantee we won't get mad."

Chao Teh was very confused. He couldn't get his thoughts organized. He shook his head.

"Nothing much against you. I just don't think the shop is giving our section enough help."

"That's true." Tang Liang paused, and when the foreman made no further comment, he went on.

"We're too damn bureaucratic. The shop chief is buried deep in his reports and never comes out. I rush from one meeting to another till I'm dizzy. Once in a while I make a tour through the sections, but it's just a waste of time—I never find anything wrong. When a section doesn't fulfil its quota we give it hell. There's nothing easier than giving other people hell. We all know how. But why haven't we made a careful search for the reasons for our failures?"

Chao Teh nodded.

"When a section falls behind with its quota," the secretary continued, "it's not always because its rate of production has dropped but because it turns out too many rejects. Instead of digging for the reason, the shop criticizes the section for having no sense of planning, for not seeing things on a national basis. The section foreman passes the criticism down the line. Actually it's these phrase-slingers—myself included—who can't see beyond their own noses!"

Tang Liang changed the subject. "Let's talk about something else, old Chao. Yeh Ying came to see me last night."

The foreman was sure she had talked about the clash with the borer, An Ta-fang.

"That little imp is making fast progress," said the Party secretary. "She was just bubbling over because she had thought of way to check that would help bring down the rejects. Her father is already using it in his section and getting good results. The idea is to check the first piece a worker turns out and tell him if anything is wrong immediately

so that he can do the rest of the batch correctly. She says she wants to try it out in Section Two. It sounds good to me. What do you think?"

"We'll give it a try."

"I hear she did try it already yesterday and hit a snag with that old boring-machine operator. The kid's too impetuous. She should have talked it over with you first. See if you can't help her along a little more, old Chao."

Thinking of his behaviour to Yeh Ying the previous day, the foreman was rather annoyed with himself.

Tang Liang set his jaw. "Those rejects are our enemy. We've got to wipe them out. Comrade Chao, you're the commander of Section Two. We expect you to show the enemy no mercy."

The two had a long chat. The concern the secretary showed for Chao Teh personally as well as for his work, the warm intimate manner in which Tang Liang spoke, warmed Chao Teh's heart. They agreed to hold an exhibition of rejects in the section. The foreman asked the secretary to criticize his methods and Tang Liang answered him frankly. It seemed to Chao Teh that the Party understood him well.

As Chao Teh was leaving, the secretary shook his big hand and said banteringly:

"I give you my word, brother textile factory, we'll send you all the machines you need, every one of them first-rate."

The foreman wanted to answer in the same jocular manner, but he could only smile.

Walking home, Chao Teh hadn't felt so relaxed for months. It was as though Tang Liang had lifted a heavy burden from his shoulders. Only the Party understood him thoroughly. It knew what was going on in his mind better than he did himself. . . . I had fallen behind the advance of society, looked back to the past too much. When your thinking machine stops, you have to clean out the muck that's jamming it. With me it was pride. What have I been doing the past few months? There were questions I handled like a fool. Yesterday, I even said to Yeh Ying: "Comrade checker, return to your own place. . . ." What an idiot! Just watch me from now on. I'm going to march in life's vanguard. . . .

The following morning Chao Teh spoke to Yeh Ying.

"Your uncle was wrong the other day, little Ying," he said. "Let's make peace. Are you sore at me?"

"I was wrong too. I should have talked to you first. The Party secretary criticized me for not first getting the support of my section leader."

"Your method is very good. I'm going to tell the whole section to use it today."

Yeh Ying could see that the foreman had regained his brilliance and drive. She was delighted.

"We're going to attack those rejects," Chao Teh went on, "and do it seriously."

The girl gave him a big smile.

"Find lots of faults," Chao Teh added.

They both laughed.

Yeh Ying didn't know what to say. She could only gaze at this foreman uncle of hers with eyes shining with hope and faith.

Nor did Chao Teh let her down.

Standing in the centre of the section he shouted above the noise of the machines that Comrade Yeh Ying wanted to try a new method of checking, that he considered it good for all concerned and wanted everyone to co-operate. At noon he called a meeting of the team leaders to discuss putting on an exhibition of rejects. The meeting decided to hold one two days later.

For the foreman to support the checker was something new in Section Two. Chao Teh had noticed several workers eyeing him in amazement when he made the announcement about the new checking method.

"What are you looking at!" he had snorted. "You'll understand soon enough!"

Yeh Ying's first stop was at the drilling machine of An Ta-fang. She approached him with a courteous smile.

"Are you still angry with me?" she asked.

The old man only grunted, but he didn't switch off his machine. Timidly, Yeh Ying inspected the first part he had machined. Then she laughed.

"Right up to standard!"

An Ta-fang grunted again.

She went next to the lathe of the young man who had called her "little flat nose."

"I shouldn't have quarrelled with you," she apologized.

Embarrassed, he made no reply.

"Are you still mad at me?" she asked as she checked his work.

"I don't know."

"Oh, you don't know. Well, this part is two sixty-fourths out. Please watch your next one." She walked away.

The young man made a wry face. But he did his work more carefully from then on.

Yeh Ying went to the third worker. . . .

On day of the exhibition all the parts that had been rejected in the past two months were arranged in a corner of the section. Chao Teh cancelled his regular afternoon meeting with the team leaders. He told them to use the period to take their workers to the exhibition.

Yeh Ying volunteered to act as guide and explain the exhibits.

When the red light flashed, the workers turned off their machines and the section was quiet. The workers finished washing, then walked over to the exhibition. Their feelings about it were mixed.

The exhibits lay in the corner of the section, lifeless and still. Of course they were inanimate objects but today, in the eyes of the workers, they came to life. They seemed to sigh and frown and scold their creators.

The voice of Yeh Ying was clear and vibrant.

"Our section's rejects in the past two months alone have cost the nation thirty-three thousand dollars. Isn't that shocking, comrades? We must wipe out the rejects, without mercy. . . ."

Like the workers, in the past Chao Teh hadn't given too much thought to the rejects. Now with them staring him in the face, he was shaken. He bitterly reproached himself. His talk with Tang Liang had awakened his mind; the exhibition brought his whole body to life. He hadn't dreamed the exhibition would be so effective. What have I been doing? he kept asking himself angrily. . . .

The next day, many workers contributed jingles for the bulletin board. "Let's Mop Up the Rejects" was the title of one. Another was called "The Rejects Accuse". . . .

Thereafter Yeh Ying's new checking method worked much better. The exhibition put new strength into the workers and the number of rejects dropped rapidly. Gradually the output began keeping pace with quota.

The days passed quickly. Before they knew it, it was the first of December. The Planning Section pinned up the figures on the November production. In the "completed quota" column, there stood Section Two in bright red letters. What a sight for sore eyes! In the "rejects" column, they showed only a trifle more than Section Five.

Good, thought Chao Teh. Now keep your eye on us this month.

Yeh Ying's big eyes shone with an irrepressible gleam. Walking through the section, she could see that the workers and their machines were obviously in fine fettle.

"Did you see the November figures?" the young lathe operator called to her triumphantly.

Chao Teh came up and took Yeh Ying's hand in his big paw.

"Thank you. Thank you very much, comrade checker."

"This is the last month of the year. Let's get Section Two out of the 'rejects' column completely," someone shouted. "What do you say, Comrade Yeh Ying?"

"We can do it," cried the young lathe operator.

Yeh Ying turned toward An Ta-fang. The old man was watching her with a smile. When he saw her looking at him, he quickly dropped his eyes to his machine.

Even the clerk she had met in the office the first day gave her a broad grin.

The girl was overcome with joy. It seemed to her that the best people in the world were in Section Two. Her uncle foreman, old An Tafang, the clerk, the young lathe operator—they had their faults, but you had to admit they were fine people. . . .

Happy tears came to her eyes. "It's because you've all worked so hard," she said in a voice that trembled. "Everyone deserves the credit. . . ."

Her father decided he simply had to invite Chao Teh to their home to celebrate. He wanted to congratulate his old friend, and his daughter, and he bought some sorghum whiskey and few tasty dishes.

At the very first cup, Chao Teh's eyes became inflamed. As Yeh Ying refilled his cup, he shook his head and said emotionally to her father:

"We two spent a lifetime together at our lathes. Our technique was pretty good and we turned out many a well-tooled part. But this brain of mine—if only that could be re-bored and polished. . . ."

Yeh Ying's father laughed. "Are you talking like this after only one drink?"

"Of course I don't mean literally. But if it hadn't been for Secretary Tang Liang. . . ."

And just at that moment in came Tang Liang himself.

"What! Drinking without inviting me?" he demanded. He pulled up a chair and sat down at the table.

Yeh Ying rushed to get him a cup and a set of chopsticks. Tang Liang poured a drink for each of them, then filled his own cup. He stood up and raised his cup high.

"To old Chao, who has caught up with life, and to our young checker comrade." He turned to Yeh Ying's father. "Everyone is praising her." He smiled at Yeh Ying, who blushed prettily. Yeh Ying's father looked at her with satisfaction while the secretary continued, "To the victory of Section Two and to its future victories. Drink, comrades, drain your cups!"

The men finished their drinks at one gulp. Even Yeh Ying took a sip.

Tang Liang had a meeting that night, and as he walked to the door he patted Yeh Ying's father on the shoulder.

"Better be careful," he said in an exaggerated whisper. "That Section Two is going to catch up with you. . . ."

Chao Teh left soon after. He was rather drunk. "Life . . . life . . ." he mumbled, as he made his way home.

Yeh Ying's father also had downed quite a few. "Little Ying," he called affectionately, "don't stay up too late." And he retired to his own room.

The girl's heart was filled with a happiness difficult to define. She opened her diary, intending to write, but she sat for a long time without touching her pen.

The factory whistle blew the signal for lights out in the dormitories, shattering the silence with its high-pitched cry. Yeh Ying's thoughts drifted far away, far into the future. . . .

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

STORM OVER A LITTLE WHITE FLAG

Chi Hsueh-pei

All the folk in Funiu Mountain are saying, "Spring is exceptionally early this year."

Quite so. February is hardly in and yet the snows on Funiu Mountain are beginning to melt. The white water from the melted snow is rushing down the valley, bearing broken branches and wisps of sodden straw, chestnut shells and last autumn's withered black leaves on its surface. The River Hsiaoshih is leaping and bubbling with spraying foam, as it flows with incredible swiftness towards the River Taju.

The snow on both banks of the Taju melted long ago and the ancient willows on the dikes on either side are beginning to put forth fat, luscious shoots of tender green. A delicious spring breeze is blowing through them, swaying the supple willow branches to and fro with a light, pendulous motion above the water.

Warm sunshine is flooding the air. Sparrows are busily chirping, making a commotion in the trees. The peasants have begun the spring work in the fields. On the river banks, their merry laughter can be heard in the distance, ringing like silver bells.

Someone has struck up a song, soft, haunting. Who can it be? Look! It comes from the lads and lasses over there, hoeing the winter wheat. North, south, east and west—they are everywhere, in groups and clusters, like great flocks of birds.

Two people were talking and joking as they walked along the highroad on the south side of the river. One, Yeh Chun-ying, was a girl barely over twenty, with sun-tanned oval face and large, lively, expressive eyes. You felt them roving over your face directly she spoke to you. The other was an old man, Chen-teh. Chun-ying had a bundle of little red and white flags under her arm as she followed Old Chen-teh, who was saying something to her in a low voice.

Yeh Chun-ying laughed and quickened her pace. "Uncle Chen-teh," she asked, "how do you think the flag-sticking system is going down with the co-op members? D'you think their work is improving because of it?"

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Old Chen-teh, thrusting out his beard, seemingly quite pleased. And making a clucking noise, he said, "The way I look at it . . . it's much better than it was before. To tell the truth, all the members of our co-op work pretty well, only—well, er—living a collective life, it's better to have a system. What do you say?" He screwed his head round and looked back at her with a complacent smile.

Yeh Chun-ying gave a little laugh, thinking, "You old fellow, you're not a bad sort, really, only when there's an unpleasant job to do, you do hate it, don't you?" Smiling, she asked, "Do you think the work of Group Three has been up to standard lately?"

"Liang-yu's group?" said Old Chen-teh, secretly startled.

"Yes."

"Well, now!" he muttered, nodding his head and going over it in the secret recesses of his mind. "Here's a young wife with a pretty sharp eye—but what shall I say? That's the group led by her husband—then—then—!" Old Chen-teh turned it over and over in his mind for a long time before he answered hesitatingly, hoping to smooth it over, "To tell the truth, well—er—the hoeing done by Liang-yu's group these few days has been a bit careless. But, you know—h'm—er—that group is made up entirely of young people, all at the learning age. If you ask me—it's passable."

"I don't agree with you," Yeh Chun-ying retorted smilingly. "I don't mean to say that they are not young people still at the learning stage. That's quite true. But there's lots of work that isn't difficult to do. For instance, hoeing. That is quite unskilled work. You can't go wrong unless you're careless and trying to get it over as soon as possible. Haven't you noticed how carelessly Liang-yu's group did the hoeing the last few days? Lumps of earth all over the place, smothering the young wheat—just a mad scrabbling, like a cat burying its business. The rows of wheat are still full of weeds, and lots of squares haven't been touched at all." Her heart gave her a little turn as she paused, then continued, "Haven't you heard any comments from the other members of the co-op about it?"

As a matter of fact, this matter had been brought to Old Chen-teh's notice already. Other members of the co-op had reported it. But being a fellow who hated frowning or scolding, he was afraid of coming out into the open and offending someone, even when, as in this case, he knew perfectly well that Group Three hadn't been doing the job properly. He'd been keeping the whole problem tight under his tongue. Now, however, cornered by Yeh Chun-ying, he admitted readily enough, "H'm, h'm. Some members have mentioned it, openly or on the sly."

"Then you've been wrong to leave it." Yeh Chun-ying's blame was softened by her smile, but she quickly added, "Whatever made you give a red flag to the wheat fields Group Three hoed at South Ridge and East Hollow?"

Old Chen-teh hadn't thought for a moment that Yeh Chun-ying would keep on so about this. Properly taken aback, he answered in a smothered voice, as though he was being choked by a lump of steamed bread, "H'm—h'm—in dealing with young folk, I've been thinking, the less trouble the better. Tell you what—they're like frisky calves—you mustn't rub them up the wrong way." And blinking at her with a sly smile, he added, "Chun-ying, let your old uncle speak frankly. You and Liang-yu are man and wife. You're together day and night. I can't believe *you* haven't said something to him on the quiet."

Yeh Chun-ying felt the colour mount suddenly to her face. Laughing, she turned to him, "Uncle Chen-teh! What *are* you saying? Do you mean that the system we all decided on serves no purpose?"

"H'm—h'm—" Old Chen-teh shook his head. "I don't mean that at all. What I mean to say is that young people are very touchy. You've got to be careful not to damp down their enthusiasm for their work."

Yeh Chun-ying couldn't help laughing. She knew he was dodging the issue, so she said point-blank, "It's no good, uncle. I can see through you! You're afraid of putting people's backs up, aren't you?"

Old Chen-teh saw that she'd got him. "You know, Chun-ying, that's a fault we old people have," he admitted with a chuckle. "If it's possible to pass a thing over, we pass it over."

But Chun-ying wasn't letting him off. She said quickly, "You can't do that, Uncle Chen-teh! We've been elected by the whole co-op to look after things for them. You mustn't always be so afraid of giving offence. Would you sooner let the co-op suffer a loss, for want of putting in a word? Could you look the members in the face again if you did? Besides—" She paused, before she said with a sigh, "Now that our chairman's away on the study course, we two have got to shoulder the whole burden of running the co-op. What's going to happen if we're afraid of upsetting people? My way of looking at it is this. From now on, never mind whose turn it is to examine the work, it's got to be done properly. Otherwise, what's the use of the system which we all agreed to use?"

The more Old Chen-teh heard the more ashamed he felt. Blinking and nodding, he hastened to agree, "Oh yes, indeed, you're quite right, quite right." But in his heart of hearts, he was protesting at being wedged into a corner like this. All very well to talk! But the whole village knew what a temper Liang-yu had, and how stubborn he could be.

What really had led up to all this was that Yeh Chun-ying, hearing the comments from some members of the co-op, had gone to the wheat fields in South Ridge and East Hollow to have a look for herself. She came back from the inspection and took it up immediately with her husband, telling him, as though half-jokingly, what she thought of him, so as to tip him off to be more careful from then on. But it made little impression on Liang-yu. He only made light of it with his wife. "Pooh. Our co-op cadres are good at finding fault."

Yeh Chun-ying said, "It's not only me! The ordinary members have criticized it as well." But he got angry at this and exclaimed, "All right! What criticism have they got? It's as clear as daylight it's because they know I'm a fast worker, and are green with envy!"

Yeh Chun-ying had then tried giving him a straight talking-to, but he wouldn't have it, and had gone out as stiff-necked as could be. And then, to add to it all, the inspector of work for the last two weeks had been Old Chen-teh, who dealt with things anyhow and stuck red flags into the very wheat fields that Liang-yu's group had hoed. Now that it was her turn to examine the work, she made up her mind to get things straight again.

She and Old Chen-teh continued talking as they walked down the road. Soon they arrived at Willow Bank; it was beyond here, to the south, that Nine Mou Field lay, the field where Li Liang-yu's group was hoeing this afternoon.

Nine Mou Field was a rich bit of low-lying land, bordered on all sides by an irrigation ditch. Long thick green shoots of wheat, which stretched into the distance, lay in even rows with hardly any breaks in the fresh spring colour. Usually, at this season the winter wheat has only just "burst the furrow," but it was particularly luxuriant on this rich piece of land, which had received a good dressing of fertilizer the previous year.

At the west end, a troop of youngsters was spread out in a line, shouting and chattering, hoeing away like hungry tigers pouncing on a flock of sheep, working towards the sun.

"Come on, put more sweat into it! Whoever gets to the end first will be the first to rest!"

"Tung-wa, wake up! Don't be the tail, left behind!"

"You're a nice one to talk." Tung-wa straightened himself, and jabbed his hoe viciously on the ground to loosen a damp clod stuck on it, at the same time rubbing the sweat off his face with the back of his hand. He objected loudly to being challenged. "Ta-lung, just see! If I don't catch up with you, I'm not Tung-wa!" And before he'd finished speaking, he bent his back again, his heavy breathing audible over the sound of his hoe.

"Go on! That's a good one!" exclaimed Tien-cheng, his mouth agape with laughter. "And if you're not called Tung-wa, what'll you be? Still the old Tung-wa!"

The whole group laughed. Meanwhile Yeh Chun-ying and Old Chen-teh approached from the east. They were walking with their heads bent, examining the part that had already been hoed. Suddenly Yeh Chun-ying stopped and called out, keeping her voice down, "Uncle Chen-teh, look at this!" She leant over and scraped the earth with her fingers. Green wheat shoots appeared. With rising indignation, she complained, "Look,

the wheat shoots shouldn't be covered up again like this just when they're coming through!"

Old Chen-teh gave a short laugh and pointing to a patch further ahead, said, "Have a look over there. For a foot or so, the surface has been barely touched. It's thick with weeds." Yeh Chun-ying gave it a glance, and knitted her brows in disgust.

The two of them made a thorough inspection of the field. To tell the truth, the hoeing had been deplorable. Unable to keep back her indignation any longer, Yeh Chun-ying shouted sarcastically towards the hoers, "Hey! What's all the hurry? Has your travel fare run out or what? You might look back and see what sort of work you've done."

The youngsters stopped hoeing altogether, and burst into an ear-splitting roar of laughter.

"You're right," Ta-lung shouted back gaily from the west end of the field. "We haven't got our travel fare. We've got to get home before dark!"

"Vice-Chairman Yeh, commend our group tomorrow!" It was Tien-cheng yelling, as he leant on his hoe. "Just consider our labour efficiency! We've 'cleaned up' the whole field in one afternoon!" And he gave a great guffaw.

Yeh Chun-ying wanted to laugh, but at the same time she was angry, so she returned to the attack with, "All right, we'll see. You'll be commended by and by."

Li Liang-yu came up to them, his black padded jacket over his shoulders. What a well set up lad he was, to be sure! His face showed a healthy glow, which shone through his dark tan. He was streaming with sweat.

As soon as he was within earshot, Yeh Chun-ying asked with a challenging smile, "Liang-yu, you're responsible for how this field is hoed, aren't you?" Guessing that something was up, he peered down at the ground, then screwed up his eyes engagingly and smilingly countered her question with another. "Why? Isn't it up to standard?"

"See for yourself!" Yeh Chun-ying moved off with an indignant look at him, and pointed out more and more faults as she walked along. "Look at this, you've buried the new wheat here. And over there—there's a whole square left out, with the weeds quite untouched. And just look at this. The surface has been barely scratched and only half the brambles hoed away." A few paces further on she turned the earth over with her toe. "Look! Some places have been hoed deep and some shallow, it's all uneven—" She pointed out many faults and finally asked, with a questioning smile, "Tell me, do *you* really call this up to standard?"

A flush rose to Li Liang-yu's face as he glanced towards Old Chen-teh. But with never a sign of guilt, he protested, "It's no good finding fault like that! Each man has his own way of farming. And anyway,

there're seven or eight members in my group. It's like the fingers of a hand—they're not all the same length—"

"Nonsense!" Yeh Chun-ying interrupted, looking him sternly in the eye, but still smiling. "You know very well this isn't up to standard." She gave a little sigh, and said gravely, "Besides, you're the group leader, and a member of the Youth League as well. You ought to be the first to carry out our co-op system."

Realizing that she was really out to pick him to pieces, Li Liang-yu retorted angrily, "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Yeh Chun-ying gave him a glance and said calmly, "I'm going to put a white flag here, that's what. You'll have to do it over again tomorrow."

"A white flag?" demanded Liang-yu stormily, his face working with anger.

"Yes!" Yeh Chun-ying fixed him with her eyes and repeated, "Yes, a white flag."

"Very well!" Li Liang-yu jerked his head in an angry nod, and stalked off with his temper fairly bursting out of him. "Please yourself! Do whatever you like. Bah!"

The row upset Old Chen-teh, but he didn't know what to do about it. When he saw Liang-yu stamp off like that in a huff, he plucked nervously at his clothes, thinking, "There you are! I knew it!" He called out in a conciliatory tone, "Liang-yu, Liang-yu!" But Liang-yu never even turned his head.

Yeh Chun-ying regarded the old man with great disapproval, and with a short laugh, said, "What good d'you think calling to him will do?" She pulled out a little white flag from her bundle, and with a swish of fluttering paper stuck it right in the middle of the field.

Dusk.

At supper Mother Li felt something was wrong. Usually the young couple were as merry and affectionate as could be. Though they had disagreed sometimes over co-op affairs, things had never looked as serious as this evening.

Liang-yu came and went in a vile temper, completely mum, as though there was no one else in the house. And his wife? After all, she was a clever woman. Still, she didn't behave quite as naturally as usual, although she joked with Liang-yu's sister Little Ling-tzu, with whom she got on very well.

Chun-ying pulled Little Ling-tzu into her room to gossip after she had washed up the supper things, leaving Mother Li alone in the courtyard with her thoughts. So there she sat, turning things over in her mind without a clue to follow. It wasn't long before she'd worked herself into a thorough state. She went to her own room in the end. No sooner had she got there, however, when Little Ling-tzu burst in pouting, and cried,

"Mum! Mum! Quick, quick! Brother and sister-in-law are having a terrible quarrel!"

Mother Li was distracted. She began to pull Little Ling-tzu out into the courtyard, but she had hardly crossed the threshold of her own room when she stopped stock-still. Mother Li was never one to rush things. She didn't expect the young couple would be quarrelling over much. Judging by the experience of her own youth, she expected it to be merely over something untactfully expressed by the young wife, or perhaps something she ought to apologize for to her husband. It is for something like this, she knew full well, that men flew into tempers. Besides, her son and daughter-in-law were young. They might be having a disagreement over something completely private, which was none of a parent's business. So she stole up to her daughter-in-law's window and stood there quietly, intending to find out what it was all about before she did anything rash.

This is what she heard: it was her daughter-in-law speaking, "You think it over properly. Why should I have done it if it wasn't for the sake of the work?"

"H'm! You've got the gift of the gab all right!" Liang-yu was quite breathless with anger. "I know perfectly well why you did it. It was just on purpose to make me lose face—to make me a laughing-stock!"

"How can you think that?" Her daughter-in-law sounded hurt. "You and I are married. We're not enemies, are we?"

"It's all very well, but it looks like that to me," answered Liang-yu, angrier than ever. "Uncle Chen-teh is an old hand at farming. *He* was willing to let it pass, but you—*you* were determined to go against me."

"Uncle Chen-teh?" Chun-ying flared up in her turn. "He's not fit to be a co-op section chief! Afraid of responsibility, afraid of giving offence! A fine mess things would be in if everyone was like him."

There was no sound for a long time.

After a while Liang-yu suddenly threw in, "I suppose you're the only one who's competent?"

Mother Li heard her daughter-in-law give a sigh, and say, still trying to be reasonable with him, "It's no use getting into such a temper with me. The problem still exists. If you don't agree with what I've done, it can be discussed at a meeting of co-op cadres. Only I would like to persuade you in future to have the interests of the co-op more at heart—and also to give a thought to my difficulties, too, eh?"

Mother Li, listening all this time, couldn't make head or tail of what she'd heard. She was wondering what to do, when she heard an indistinct rustling sound and then heard her daughter-in-law asking in low, startled tones, "Where on earth are you going on such a cold night?"

"Mind your own business!"

A black shadow crossed the window, and Liang-yu raged out of the room with a quilt under his arm. In her agitation, Mother Li entirely forgot that she was eavesdropping and cried out, "Liang-yu, come back!"

But Liang-yu didn't pay the slightest attention. He didn't even bother to look in her direction.

So there Mother Li stood dumbfounded, blaming her son. "Over twenty! Anyone would expect you to be grown-up by now. But you're still as obstinate as a mule!"

She took Little Ling-tzu into the young couple's room, where her daughter-in-law greeted her with a smile, and immediately pulled up a chair for her as though nothing had happened. Mother Li appreciated the gesture, and smiled in her turn, thinking what a good daughter-in-law she had. But she couldn't help asking with concern, "Whatever's the matter between you two, my child?"

Chun-ying answered with a smile, "It's nothing, mother. We were just teasing each other."

That didn't sound at all convincing to Mother Li. She insisted on being told what was up. Upon being pressed, Chun-ying told her everything that had happened in the afternoon, but added comfortingly in her smiling way, "Now, mum, don't you get worked up. It'll soon blow over."

Meeting her daughter-in-law's eyes, Mother Li replied, "I know that." Then she heaved a sigh. "Oh, it isn't easy to work for the public good. Heavens! There're several hundred people in our co-op, all from different families with different surnames. How can you manage without knowing how to deal with each one of 'em? Don't think your old ma doesn't see it all. There you are, rushing round all day long over co-op affairs, with never a moment for a bowl of rice in between."

Chun-ying answered with a smile, "Don't take on so, mum! I can look after myself—it's not as though I'm a three-year-old."

"That's all very well, but just look at you!" her mother-in-law cried reproachfully. "You've grown so thin these few days!" She was really upset. "As for that child Liang-yu, he's always been obstinate—he was born that way! You mustn't let him worry you." Then she looked at her daughter-in-law, and said awkwardly, "I know you mustn't consider your own private feelings when you're conducting public affairs. But after all, he's a man, and has his pride. Give way to him a bit, for my sake, so that we don't have these upsets over nothing."

Chun-ying understood her mother-in-law's feelings. She smiled and said affectionately, "Trust me, mum. I'll see that you aren't upset again."

After her mother-in-law left her, Yeh Chun-ying went to bed, but could not get a wink of sleep. Her mind was going over and over the problem. She was quite sure that what she was doing was in the interest of the work. How could her husband twist matters to say that she had tried deliberately to put him in the wrong? And if things went on like this, how could the co-op affairs be managed at all? Besides, when her own husband behaved like that, how could she criticize other people? Ought she, perhaps, to give way to him? No, no, that wouldn't do. She

couldn't treat the co-op affairs lightly. There was nothing for it, she decided in the end, but to have it out with him.

Meanwhile Liang-yu was spending the night in an open shed in the front courtyard. It had been the cow-house, but since last year, when the mutual-aid team had turned into the co-op, it hadn't been needed, as the co-op cattle were looked after collectively elsewhere. So there he was, wrapped in a thin cotton quilt, lying on an old broken-legged bed propped up against the inner wall. He couldn't sleep either, but was tossing to and fro. His brain was a jangle with confused thoughts. What had really got him on the raw was that his wife had the nerve to make trouble for *him*—making him lose face before all the others, indeed! He also went over and over all the small happenings, until he almost made himself believe that his wife's attitude had changed, and that she no longer loved him. Just look at the way she'd been picking holes in him! It had been all the more marked, he felt, since she became vice-chairman of the co-op last year. He grew more and more sorry for himself, and decided angrily, "All right, we'll see! Anyway I'm not going to let her trample all over me!"

Suddenly a cold northwest wind swirled round the courtyard, and blew straight into the shed with a rustle of withered leaves. Liang-yu shivered, and peered out into the darkness. The sky was as black as a pool of ink. He hurriedly muffled himself into the quilt, pulling it right over his head, and began yet again to turn things over in his mind, over and over. . . .

Yeh Chun-ying was woken up by a sudden noise. She listened carefully and heard the branches of the little date tree that grew by the eaves being shaken by the wind. Then came another violent gust of wind, followed by the patter of raindrops against the paper panes. "Oh dear!" she thought with a start. "It's turned so cold, and the wind has brought rain. Yet he's taken only that thin quilt. He'll be frozen!" All thought of sleep left her and she jumped down off the bed, groped around on the table for her torch, and flinging an old garment over her head ran out into the courtyard.

The northwest wind was blowing in gusts, bringing with it flurried splatters of cold rain. Pools of water were already glistening in the courtyard. She splashed through them to the front gate, but no sooner had she opened it than a sudden blast made her gasp. Outside it was pitch black—with no sound but the wind and the rain. Anxiety seized hold of her in good earnest. Where on earth could she look for him in the middle of the night, she wondered. There she stood in the open gateway, sick with worry. At length she had to give up the idea of looking for Liang-yu, admitting reluctantly to herself, "Oh, well, serves him right!"

But just as she was trudging back through the courtyard, she heard an unexpected sound coming from the shed, as if someone were muttering

in his sleep. She turned on her torch immediately, and discovered her husband. With annoyance and pity battling within her, she hurried back to her room for a thick quilt, which she laid lightly over him. She stood by him for a moment and breathed an almost inaudible sigh. But just as she turned to go, Liang-yu woke and said, "What's that?"

Yeh Chun-ying couldn't help bursting into a little laugh. But Liang-yu's temper hadn't calmed down. He recognized who it was and wouldn't make another sound. At the same time he felt the weight of the extra cover.

Yeh Chun-ying asked softly, "Still angry with me?"

He refused to answer, and angrily turned his back.

"Obstinate as a mule!" She scolded, but her actual words were belied by the tone of her voice. "When there's something between us, you won't discuss it properly. You just give way to temper."

Liang-yu heaved a great sigh.

"Think it over." With a quick twist, Yeh Chun-ying sat down on the edge of the bed. "Blaming someone else for making trouble, indeed! It's you who're in the wrong. If *you* don't carry out the system we all agreed on, how can I criticize the others? You're always thinking of your own 'face.' But what about the collective interest? Isn't that important too?"

But it made no difference what she said, she couldn't get even a grunt out of him. Half annoyed and half amused, she tucked the bedding around him, and whispered to him, "Liang-yu, you really must listen to me. If it's fine tomorrow, be sure to take Group Three to Nine Mou Field and tidy up that bit."

Li Liang-yu flung the bedding off his head and looked around. But his wife had already gone. He didn't quite know how, but a load seemed to have slipped off him and something warm had stolen into his breast instead. But this was mixed up with a feeling of shame. He gave a little sigh of relief, buried his head in the bedding and fell into a refreshing sleep.

The rain had stopped by early morning. There were rifts in the thin grey clouds, through which blue sky could be seen. A light northwest breeze was still blowing, but it was not enough to dry the ground. The soil was still sticky and unworkable. Taking advantage of this enforced pause, Yeh Chun-ying told Little Hu-tzu to call the co-op group leaders to a meeting, to discuss the spring programme.

Directly after breakfast, the leaders were arriving in twos and threes at the co-op administrative office. They were chattering idly, waiting for the rest to come before the meeting could be called to order.

Somebody mentioned the fact that Group Three had got a white flag the previous day for their work on Nine Mou Field. This wasn't much

in itself, but everyone had something to say about it. In fact, there was quite a commotion.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Ma Ju-yi, shrugging his shoulders. And without looking at anyone in particular, he added, with his head on one side, "Long overdue to my mind."

Li Chun-ming grinned at Ma Ju-yi, and, cutting the air with his right arm, burst out laughing. "Leader of Group Two, I thoroughly agree with your opinion." Then, blinking slyly and emphasizing his words with a gesture, he continued, "Oh dear me, you should just see that bit Group Three hoed. I swear it's like a mangy donkey—here a scab and there a patch. As I see it—pah!—they're simply 'scrambling for wage points.'"

"You're right," the leader of the women's work group, Li Feng-chih, agreed, glad to be able to get her word in. "It's Group Three's fault for trying to get through their work as quickly as possible. But it's also partly that old living Buddha's fault. Old Chen-teh can see as well as you or I that the work has been scamped, but he's afraid of giving offence."

A woman behind gave her a poke. Li Feng-chih looked towards the doorway and saw Old Chen-teh step over the threshold. But she wasn't put out in the slightest, and said, "All right, let him come. Who cares?" She stood up, offered her stool to Old Chen-teh, and said with a grin, "Mister Chen-teh, we were just criticizing you for spoiling Group Three."

"Ho, ho!" Old Chen-teh's face grew red. Waving his hand, he said, "This—this—you needn't go on about it. I accept your criticism. I'll change, now that I know where I'm wrong."

"Hey, Uncle Chen-teh," another women's labour group leader, Li Chiao-chiao, called out loudly, "I hear that Liang-yu and his wife have had words over that flag-sticking business."

Old Chen-teh peered all round and saw that neither Liang-yu nor Chun-ying had arrived yet. He grinned with relief and said, "Ai-ya! Directly Liang-yu heard Chun-ying say she was going to give his group a white flag, you should have seen his face! His expression nearly startled me out of my skin. But as for Chun-ying. . . ." He shook his head and brought his hands down for emphasis. "She never took the slightest notice; just went ahead and planted a white flag!"

The others nodded approval, laughing, especially the talkative girls. A hubbub arose, as they voiced their appreciation.

"Quite right! Good for Chun-ying! That's really 'putting aside private considerations in public work.'"

"Brother Liang-yu thinks too much of himself. It's his own fault for not carrying out the system. What's the use of flying into a rage about it?"

"H'm! Male superiority!"

The comments came from all and sundry, and the noise grew louder and louder.

As Li Liang-yu came into the courtyard, he heard that he was being pulled to pieces—you could hear nothing but Liang-yu this and Liang-yu that. He flushed, filled with sudden misgivings. Ought he to go in and face it? His pride wouldn't let him. He made up his mind quickly and crept into the adjoining barn amongst the straw.

Once there, he felt horribly awkward. It just happened the barn was only separated from the office by a partition open at the top, so that he could hear every word that was being said.

There went someone else, in a piercing voice, "Say what you like, I don't consider Li Liang-yu shows a proper regard for his wife. He thinks it's all right if other people criticize him, but not his wife."

"It's wrong." That was Li Chun-ming. "A wife is a wife. That's his household business. But where the work is concerned, Chun-ying happens to be in a position of responsibility. You can't mix the two, any more than you can measure out sesame and millet as though they were the same."

The more Li Liang-yu heard, the more apprehensive he became. He knew perfectly well that he was in the wrong and that the masses were not on his side. But he had not yet reached the stage where he could give in entirely.

Just at this moment a sudden silence fell. Then they could all be heard greeting Chun-ying affectionately.

"Chun-ying, how is it Liang-yu hasn't come?"

"Was Liang-yu any better when he got home? Is his group going to tidy up Nine Mou Field when the weather clears up?"

Li Liang-yu's heart thumped hard. He was afraid that Chun-ying would tell them how he behaved last night. If she really did—he wouldn't have any face left at all.

He jumped up suddenly and leant against the partition, straining his ears to hear what Chun-ying would say.

"What *are* you thinking of?" Chun-ying answered easily, in a clear, bright voice. "Liang-yu was very reasonable when he came home. After all, he's a member of the Youth League—if *he* doesn't support the system, who will? He's already agreed to tidy Nine Mou Field up, directly the earth is dry enough."

"Good for him! Now *that's* the proper way to behave!" Old Chen-teh's exclamation raised a laugh from them all.

A big rock seemed to have tumbled from Li Liang-yu's heart. He gave a long, long sigh of relief, thinking to himself, "She's clever, all right. No wonder everyone's for her."

After the meeting, Yeh Chun-ying and Li Liang-yu walked home together. Noticing that the earth in the wheat fields on either side of

the road was workable again, Yeh Chun-ying turned to him with a smiling query, "Well, *are* you going to Nine Mou Field this afternoon?"

"Eh?" Li Liang-yu wanted to chuckle, but he raised his arm, pretending to scratch his head. Then, as though it was pure chance that his arm was hiding his face, he said slyly, "Can't get out of it, can I? You've promised for me!"

"How did you hear it?" It was Chun-ying's turn to try to keep from laughing now.

"I—"

"You were next door, in the straw."

"What?"

"Don't get excited!" Yeh Chun-ying bubbled with laughter. "I saw you crouching on that heap of straw."

At that, Li Liang-yu couldn't keep himself in any more and was off like a streak of smoke, his face scarlet.

It was dark by the time Liang-yu got back from hoeing Nine Mou Field. Quickly, while there was no one else in the courtyard, he stole into the shed and took the bedding back.

Supper over, Mother Li was secretly pleased to observe that her son had gone back into his own room with his wife. But she was not yet absolutely easy in her mind, so she waited until everything was quiet, and again crept up to their window. All she could hear was a low murmur of intimate conversation inside.

"You didn't get one over the lot of them, after all."

"*Them?*" her son responded, chuckling. "Who d'you mean, them? I obeyed the leadership."

Now her daughter-in-law was laughing. "But you'll have to be careful in the future," she said. "I can give way to you in everything else, but you'd better get it out of your head that I'll give way to you where the work is concerned."

"Go on!" Liang-yu again chuckled softly. "Who wants you to give way all the time? Just help me as much as you can."

"We'll help each other," her daughter-in-law answered happily.

There was no sound for a long time. And then suddenly they both burst into a fit of low laughter.

Mother Li gave a soft sigh of relief, and a thought, which she kept to herself, passed through her mind. "That's right. My daughter-in-law's quite right. Where the work is concerned, she mustn't just give way to the young whelp." And she tiptoed quietly away.

LO TSAI THE TIGER-HUNTER

Li Nan-li

When I was still a kid, the neighbours' children and I often went to play with Uncle Lo Tsai.

Uncle Lo was a strapping great youngster then, the strongest man in our parts. Without using a shoulder pole, he could carry home two big buckets of water from the well several hundred yards away, not stopping once for breath either. Everybody who saw him on a job admired him. And he was the kindliest fellow imaginable. He never refused help to anyone in trouble, often going out of his way to lend folk a hand. When he had time to spare we used to hang on his back or neck and cling to him like leeches while he rolled over and over, laughing fit to burst. He never lost his temper.

The local landlords were all keen to hire him, but he didn't stay long with any of them—he couldn't get on with rich folk. "Poor in pocket doesn't mean poor in spirit!" he would mutter as he rolled up his bedding and left.

One noon, a few of us decided to play a trick on Uncle Lo when we had our usual game of Blind Man's Buff that evening; because if he failed to catch any of us, we could fine him by making him bring us wild pears from the mountain the next day. We had it nearly all worked out when we heard Lo Tsai shouting in Landlord Wang's courtyard:

"I'm through! I don't need *your* rice to keep alive!"

"Get out!" growled Wang in the husky voice of an opium addict. "Think I can't hire anyone else?"

They went on shouting at each other, more and more loudly and furiously, until a first class row was in progress. We kids were so frightened we forgot the trick we had meant to play. Without waiting to hear what the quarrel was about, we skedaddled home.

The next day, when my mother saw me dawdling and fidgeting about the house looking completely lost, she knew it was because I couldn't go and play with Uncle Lo.

"It's no use your wishing you were larking about with Lo Tsai all the time!" she said. "He's gone to Sunset Pass to learn to be a hunter, and it may be a year before he's back. You're getting to be a big boy.

Better start doing some study. Or you can go out and collect a crate of cow dung for me. Who ever heard of a great boy of seven or eight spending all his time playing?"

But then she sighed softly.

"That skinflint Wang has brass coins for eyes," she said. "Money's all he cares about—not people!"

The day before, while Lo Tsai was helping an old widow dig sweet potatoes, the landlord had looked for him to carry the sedan-chair to fetch the daughter of the house home; but he was nowhere to be found. That was how the trouble started. Then Lo Tsai lost his temper and threw up his job.

He decided he'd had enough of working for overbearing landlords; he would learn a trade and support himself that way. So when he heard that a famous tiger-hunter at Sunset Pass was looking for apprentices, it sounded just the thing for him. He made up his mind to be a hunter, and left the next day.

"Since I can't fight landlords, I'm going to fight tigers," he told people as he was leaving. "I shall be able to vent my feelings properly that way!"

Years went by. We kids grew up and became peasants, pedlars, students—we each had to choose a job and try to make a living at it—until even the best of our childhood memories faded. Though Uncle Lo was now a hunter with a fur apron and a pipe made from a deer's shinbone, we never heard of his killing a tiger. Year in year out he made ends meet by catching smaller game: stags, hares, deer, boars and the like. Sometimes we called to him in fun:

"If you kill a tiger, Uncle Lo, don't forget to give us a share of the bones!"*

"Of course," he would answer confidently. "Mind you don't fight over them!"

At times like these he seemed only too eager to chat; but we all had our own lives to lead, and did not stop to listen to the wonderful tales of hunting he must have had to tell.

So Uncle Lo had to make friends with the smaller boys again. He used to amuse them with his boar bristles, stag horns and pheasant feathers, tussling and romping with them with his unfailing good humour. He was kindness itself to all children, even giving odds and ends to Landlord Wang's son, Erh-mao.

One day, however, just after he'd divided a dozen or more pheasant feathers among the kids, and they were having a fine time on the threshing floor, Erh-mao came running up and threw his feather in Lo Tsai's face. Then, his hands on his hips, the boy struck a haughty attitude.

* Tiger bones are highly valued in China for their medicinal properties.

"Pauper! Lazy devil!" he jeered shrilly. "My dad told me not to take your pheasant feather. He's going to buy me a real feather, seven or eight feet long, next time he goes to town! My dad says, too, that time when you wouldn't work for our family he heard a lot of brave talk from you; but you've turned out no good at all." Erh-mao curled his lip and his nose twitched. "You say you hunt tigers; but the very smell of them scares you! There's a tiger on White Mist Mountain! I dare you to hunt it! My dad says it's our Wang family's mountain spirit, and no one can touch a hair of its fur!"

The other kids stared blankly. Lo Tsai changed colour and gritted his teeth, then jumped up as if to throttle the boy. But there were tears in his eyes, and after glaring in silence at Erh-mao he strode off without a glance behind, lurching unsteadily in his fury.

White Mist Mountain was over twenty miles in circumference. The weeds there overtopped a man's head, the vines twisted and intertwined like network, and the spreading branches of the dense pine and fir forests shut out the sun. A thick carpet of leaves lay underfoot, dank and rotting; and even on fine days thick mist shrouded the hillside. Whether this mountain belonged to Wang or not is hard to say; but he had persuaded four tenants to start cultivating it, and squeezed over a hundred bushels of maize in rent from them each year. In fact, Wang was looking for more tenants; but life on White Mist Mountain was hard. You had to walk over three miles up hill and down for water and over a mile to get a light. The mountain swarmed with wolves and wild boars, from whom you had to protect your livestock, crops and even your children. And every winter you had to carry your grain on your back to Landlord Wang as rent. Yes, a man's life hung by a thread on White Mist Mountain. And now that a tiger had appeared, the four tenant families there had lost three pigs and a buffalo had been bitten to death. Fortunately they had discovered this last in time to save its hide and over a hundred catties of beef.

While the tenants were considering asking Lo Tsai up to the mountain, they received a note from Landlord Wang ordering them to subscribe towards a temple for his mountain spirit.

The tenants talked this over. Building a temple and enlisting Lo Tsai's help would both cost money; but if the hunter succeeded in killing the tiger that would be worth much more to them than a temple. They sent someone to sound him out. Lo Tsai knew how hard life was on White Mist Mountain, and it was his life's ambition to kill a tiger; so he announced that he wouldn't expect any reward for his services. He went to have a look at the tiger's track, found suitable places for traps, then fetched his two hounds—Dark Mouth and Black Treasure—and put up with one of the tenants.

When Landlord Wang heard of this, he was furious. He sought Lo Tsai out and threatened him.

"What makes you think *you* can kill a tiger? You'll walk straight into its mouth. Besides, didn't I tell you long ago that tiger is our family spirit?"

"Tigers are dangerous beasts," said Lo Tsai. "Even if he's a Wang ancestor, I'm going to get him."

The landlord tried to intimidate his tenants too by warning them that he would not rent land to anyone who helped Lo Tsai.

By the time Lo Tsai actually left to hunt the tiger, most of us were pretty worked up on his account. We talked of nothing else, and asked news of him everywhere.

One day, two days, passed. Word came from White Mist Mountain that the tiger had disappeared, and we sighed with relief. Obviously, the tiger was afraid of Lo Tsai! Though the hunter hadn't killed it yet, this was enough already to stop the landlord's mouth.

But Lo Tsai had learned his craft from a famous tiger-hunter. He knew that the tiger hadn't run away. It was simply that the sudden appearance of a strange man and two bold, intelligent hounds had made it lie low to watch developments.

When six days had gone by, hunger drove the tiger out from its lair. As if hurling a challenge at Lo Tsai, it carried off a pig belonging to the tenant with whom he was staying.

By following its tracks, the hunter discovered that its lair was at the foot of a cliff. Each time the tiger came out, it had to pass through a gully where there stood a great pine. There were marks on the trunk where the bark had been newly rubbed off, and a few tiger-hairs had fallen under the tree.

Relying on his superb marksmanship and courage, Lo Tsai decided not to dig pits or use poison. Shouldering his two muskets, he set out with his hounds.

Once near the tiger's cliff, he blew his horn, and the hounds bounded forward. After turning back to see the direction in which their master was pointing, they rushed on, sniffing the ground and giving tongue, towards the tiger's lair.

The mountain, usually so quiet, resounded now with the echoes of the horn and the baying of the hounds, which rang from peak to valley. The leaves in the forest rustled. Startled into action, the tiger left its lair and loped out from under the cliff.

Dark Mouth was the first to reach it. Planting himself in the tiger's path, he barked madly, goading the great beast to spit three times. When Dark Mouth stood his ground, the tiger grew angry. Its fur bristling, it launched itself at the plucky hound, who leapt nimbly aside and landed just behind the tiger, giving tongue all the time as fiercely as ever. Having missed its quarry, the tiger headed with drooping tail down the gully; but still Dark Mouth dogged its steps. And now Black Treasure appeared

on the scene. Together the two hounds drove the tiger to the mouth of the gully.

Lo Tsai had found a vantage point thirty paces from the gully, and here he was sitting with his loaded muskets resting on a boulder and trained upon the great pine.

The tenants were watching from a distance on another peak; for they dared not help Lo Tsai, nor would he let them join him. They saw the tawny tiger, large as a buffalo, shake the trees on either side as it charged straight towards where Lo Tsai was sitting. Fearful that the hunter could never kill such a brute, they started shouting wildly.

Through a gap in the trees Lo Tsai watched the tiger, its eyes ablaze, bound furiously forward, sending broken twigs flying in all directions. He could smell its rank stench as it hurtled towards the great pine.

The size of the huge beast took him aback; for he was afraid two shots would not be enough to finish it off. But steadying himself, he hugged his musket tightly to his chest and took unwinking aim.

As its custom was, the tiger plumped down by the tree to rub its hind quarters against the trunk, till pine needles showered down thick and fast.

As it neared the pine it had swept the surroundings with its baleful eyes, noting the hounds which were still on its track. Lo Tsai dared delay no longer. His whole body taut, he pulled the trigger with a finger like an iron hook. There was a flash and a roar! But in spite of the burst of flame and the sudden explosion, the hunter did not even blink. As the shot rang out, the tiger fell; and as he seized his second musket to fire another shot, he saw Dark Mouth fly forward to bury his teeth in the tiger's shoulder, just as he did when any lesser game was hit. Thinking the tiger done for, Lo Tsai did not use his second shot. He got up and started forward.

But in that split second he missed his chance. The tiger was not dead: one of its legs only was broken. Knocked out by the sudden crash, Dark Mouth's sharp teeth brought it back to consciousness. At once it tossed its head, sank its fangs in the hound's neck and wrenched away both Dark Mouth and some of its own flesh at the same time. Then, just as Black Treasure was going to hurl himself on the quarry from behind, the tiger levelled its mighty tail, powerful as an iron rod, and lashed out, felling the second hound also to the ground. Before Lo Tsai could see what had happened to his hounds or fire his second musket, the great beast had swung off into the forest.

When Lo Tsai dashed to the foot of the pine and realized what had happened, he was torn between rage and remorse. All his painstaking preparations and the lives of his two faithful, plucky hounds had been bartered for this—a small pool of blood on the ground! And the sight of Black Treasure lying there at his last gasp, too weak to struggle to his feet, made him repent his foolhardiness even more bitterly.

He bent down to pick Black Treasure up; and realized as he stroked the dog that his hind legs and the lower part of his spine had been broken by the lash of the tiger's tail. The hound rallied all his failing strength to lick his master's hands, and gazed at him with devoted eyes as if in farewell. This made the hunter feel even worse.

"Don't be upset," he said hoarsely. "It was my fault, and I'll avenge you."

Stroking the dog in his arms, and comforting him as best he could, Lo Tsai began to pace slowly back towards the house where he was staying.

He had not gone far when he was overtaken by the tenants, who had heard the shot and lost sight of the tiger. Assuming that it was dead, they had come to investigate.

When they saw Lo Tsai walking downhill with a dog in his arms, they stopped in dismay.

"What's happened to your hound, Lo Tsai?" cried one of them eagerly.

Lo Tsai said nothing, but kept on his way.

"It looks as if he's through," muttered the first speaker behind him. "He's not only failed to kill the tiger, but lost both hounds."

"What?" Goaded into speech, Lo Tsai glared so sternly at the tenant that the poor man fell back two paces.

"I . . . I was only asking," he said apologetically.

"I'm not through," declared Lo Tsai, hiding his distress. "I guarantee to get this tiger. And before long too."

He looked down at Black Treasure, already dead. And as he stroked the dog he reached a decision.

"But I hate to do it this way!" he cried.

"What do you mean?" asked the startled tenants.

"If you won't risk your child, you won't catch the wolf," he quoted. "I must use him once more."

Having made up his mind to use poison, Lo Tsai went out to see where the tiger had gone. The trail showed the imprints of three paws only; so evidently the fourth leg was badly wounded and the beast could no longer jump very high. It had hidden itself in a tangle of undergrowth and vines.

That evening, after putting poison in Black Treasure's stomach, Lo Tsai carried the dog to the foot of a fir near the tiger's hide-out.

He rose at dawn the next morning.

"Fetch a few men," he told the tenant he was staying with. "You'll have to carry the tiger back presently."

This said, he shouldered his muskets and left. The tenant threw a jacket over his shoulders, then hurried out to urge Lo Tsai to wait till everybody was ready; but the hunter was already out of earshot. The tenant took down his own musket, and set out to fetch the others.

This time Lo Tsai was certain that the method the famous tiger-hunter had taught him would succeed—especially since this tiger was already badly hurt.

He went to the fir where he had left the bait. Sure enough, Black Treasure was gone. In the soft mud near by were imprints of the tiger's paws.

"You brute!" he cursed. "Let's see what you can do now!"

He followed the trail, expecting the tiger to have collapsed not far away.

He searched and searched, till he passed the undergrowth where the tiger had hidden, and the tracks disappeared. He turned back to see if there was any other track. But no, the tiger's trail ended here.

Lo Tsai stopped before the tangle of vines, and stared into the matted undergrowth. Now that he knew where to look, he could see that the wild grass in front of him was trampled and hear the tiger breathing among the vines. Although he could not see the brute, in point of fact they were face to face. He tentatively parted the undergrowth with the barrel of his musket, and some of the withered vines crackled.

"Pa . . . ah!"

Suddenly the tiger spat, so startling Lo Tsai that he drew back his musket and leapt to one side. He remembered the proverb: A wounded tiger loses none of its fierceness! And thinking of Dark Mouth's fate, his heart beat faster.

There was no water on the mountain, and the poison took effect slowly; so after eating the bait the tiger had slunk back to the undergrowth, but found itself too thirsty to sleep. Presently its belly began to ache, and it started to panic. Several times it made as if to go out in search of water, then fell back weakly and lay there panting. When Lo Tsai disturbed it by prodding the undergrowth, the tiger could do nothing else but spit. This effort made its pain even worse, however, and its breath came in gasps.

As Lo Tsai braced himself to listen carefully to the tiger's panting, the realization that the poison was beginning to take effect reassured him. He parted the undergrowth again with the barrel of his musket in order to take a look at his quarry. First he saw the tiger's eyes, lustreless now and half closed. Then he noticed that because of its pain the beast had curled itself up.

Lo Tsai exulted. After all, he had beaten the tiger to its knees!

He raised his musket and took careful aim, meaning to despatch the brute with one shot. But even as he fired, the tiger gave a roar and summoned up its last reserves of strength to charge at him. The hunter was taken completely by surprise. With a cry, he threw himself backwards.

There happened to be a pit over ten feet deep behind him, and he rolled into the dry bracken at the bottom of this, dropping his musket in

the process. At the same time the tiger, thanks to the violence of its charge, crashed into the pit too.

Lo Tsai struggled to his feet and saw the tiger lying before him. Throwing caution to the winds he leapt forward and seized the beast's throat as hard as he could, pressing the tiger with all his might against the side of the pit. He dared not relax his hold.

Its fall had made the tiger so dizzy that it had little strength left. But it struggled to shake off the vice-like grip on its neck, clawing at the hunter. The poison was taking effect, however. The tiger's strength was ebbing. Though it clawed open Lo Tsai's chest, he still clung to it desperately, sweat pouring down his face and his breath coming in gasps. Blood streamed down his chest.

By now the tenants on White Mist Mountain had gathered. With knives, guns and sticks, they hurried in the direction of the shot to Lo Tsai's aid.

"Look!" exclaimed the first to catch sight of the hunter in the pit. "The tiger's got him!"

"What!" cried the others in horror. "Where?"

He pointed out the place, and they halted. But after a moment's dismay, they tightened their grip on their weapons and hurried to the pit.

Once they were near enough to see clearly, they heaved a sigh of relief and jumped down. Together they beat the tiger to death. Still clasping the great beast, Lo Tsai rolled over with it on the ground, and the tenants saw that he was unconscious and covered with blood.

They shouted his name.

"Is the tiger dead?" asked Lo Tsai, opening his eyes a fraction. His voice was weak.

"It's dead! You killed the tiger after all, Lo Tsai!"

Lo Tsai wanted to laugh, but was too weak. He closed his eyes again.

The others chose a man to carry the hunter home on his back, while the rest of them trussed the tiger on a pole and bore it away.

While everybody rejoiced for Lo Tsai's sake that he had killed the tiger, his wound caused general concern. Landlord Wang was the only exception. Far from taking pleasure in the hunter's exploit, he began plotting to get even with him.

In order that Lo Tsai might have all he needed to recover, the villagers decided to sell the tiger skin.

As soon as Wang heard of this, he put his foot down.

"That tiger was our Wang family's mountain spirit," he declared, hurrying furiously to where the villagers were discussing the matter. "I told you no one was to touch a hair on its body! Who does Lo Tsai think he is? Even to beat a dog you have to ask the owner's permission. He has a mighty fine opinion of himself, and plenty of nerve, to do a thing like this! If the tiger had mauled or bitten him to death it would have

served him right! It's not the death of one tiger that matters so much; but he's stirred up big trouble for us all. Now that the mountain spirit is angry, it may send down many more tigers, and then who will dare cultivate the land on White Mist Mountain for me? And who'll make up to me for those hundreds of bushels of rent? Tell me that, will you?"

We youngsters were livid to hear such outrageous talk, but some of the older folk answered meekly:

"Please be generous and overlook it, Mr. Wang! He'll work for you when he's better. He'll be able to make it up to you later."

"That won't do!" The fact that some of us were intimidated added to the landlord's confidence. "I don't want him to work for me. I've money, I've rice; I can hire all the hands I need." Then he pretended to make a great concession. "Still, since you all want me to let him off, and we Wangs have been known for generations for our charity, I'll let the matter drop. But I can't have you touching that tiger. I'm going to build a shrine to the tiger spirit, and have masses said for it for several days."

When we heard this, we realized the reason for his visit. In those days, though, it was unthinkable for muddy-legged labourers to oppose a landlord. By dint of hard pleading we persuaded Wang to leave the tiger bones to Lo Tsai, and take the skin himself.

But although the landlord had achieved his aim, he still felt he had not intimidated us enough.

"If not for your sakes," he growled, "I'd drag that dog Lo Tsai out and bury him under the temple pillar!"

Lo Tsai knew nothing of all this. When we went to see him he was lying groaning in his tumbledown thatched cottage. And no one liked to tell him, because we all wanted him to recover as quickly as possible.

He still wasn't better by the following year. Although the wounds on his chest had healed, he often vomited and spat blood. His encounter with the tiger and his long illness afterwards had changed a strong man into nothing but skin and bones. After some time all the money from the sale of the tiger bones was spent; but the grateful tenants on White Mist Mountain, unknown to Landlord Wang, kept the hunter supplied with food.

A year later I joined the revolution and heard no more of him.

In 1949, when the Southwest was liberated, I went back with the army to work in my own province. Hearing that some of my old folk were left, I wrote a letter home; and because I had never forgotten Uncle Lo Tsai, I asked after him in my letter. In the reply he was specially mentioned, and I was glad to know that the hunter was still alive.

From subsequent letters I learned more about Uncle Lo Tsai, and was delighted to hear that he had taken an active part in the winter of 1950 and the following spring in the peasants' movement to demand a re-

duction of rents and the return of their deposits, and in settling scores with local despots. Thanks to the uncompromising struggle he had always waged with the landlord class, he was now chairman of the *hsiang*'s Peasants' Association.

One early summer day in 1951, a peasant came to my office. He had a grey beard and slightly bent shoulders, but seemed full of energy. I did not know him.

"Please take a seat, grandad," I said after greeting him.

He roared with laughter, quite naturally, as if oblivious to all the strangers watching him.

"I guessed you wouldn't recognize me," he answered. "But I knew you the moment I set eyes on you. You're no taller or fatter." He rubbed his chin. "And you haven't much of a beard."

I began to feel embarrassed. I realized now who he was.

"I'm Lo Tsai," he said, then sat down as if that was a weight off his mind. "They told me you kept asking after me in your letters. You didn't forget the old man; and I've been wanting to come to see you. Who'd have thought you wouldn't recognize me, but call me grandad!"

He laughed again, then tugged at his beard, afraid he was making me uncomfortable.

"The fact is, I've changed a good deal," he explained.

By now I could identify the Uncle Lo I remembered with this fifty-year-old peasant before me. I invited him to my room in the dormitory for a good talk.

"Have you come to Chungking on business?" I asked.

"Yes." His face lit up. "My old job—catching tigers."

"Catching tigers?" He had me fooled. "What tigers? There aren't any tigers in Chungking."

"Tiger Wang! You know that bastard Landlord Wang! A few years after the war against Japanese aggression started, Chiang Kai-shek came to Szechuan; and with Kuomintang backing Wang became really fierce. His son Erh-mao got a job with the police, and Wang was able to pull strings to become head of several wards. That made him worse than ever, and he treated us poor peasants so savagely that everybody took to calling him Tiger Wang. After the people's army liberated our county town and we heard Chairman Mao and the Communist Party were looking after our interests, the first thing we did was to go to Tiger Wang to settle scores with him. That black-hearted swine pretended to have turned over a new leaf, and returned people their grain and deposits. But at the same time he sent Erh-mao to join the bandits in the hills, and when they were strong enough they came down to frighten the country folk, and ordered peasants to give back what the landlords had returned them. Well, I wasn't afraid of him; and I was the first to try for a showdown. The muskets I hadn't used for years could still be fired; and when the People's Government saw how determined we were, they gave us proper rifles too. Then the army was sent to mop up bandits; and Erh-mao and his lot couldn't stand up to regular troops. They just caved in. When Tiger Wang saw Erh-mao's game was up, he felt the ground gape beneath his feet and made a beeline for Chungking. So I came to Chungking to catch the tiger!"

"Did you get him?"

"Yes. Of course. We'd had a clue to his whereabouts for some time. We brought a letter of introduction, and asked the security office here to help. Then we caught him as easily as catching a turtle in a jar!"

I realized that while Lo Tsai's character hadn't changed in the least, he was much cannier than before.

"This tiger hunt was not like your last, Uncle Lo," I said. "You didn't suffer yourself this time!"

"Suffer? With Chairman Mao at the helm, how could I?"

This, then, is the story of Lo Tsai, the tiger-hunter.

Translated by Gladys Yang

PU SUNG-LING AND "TALES OF LIAO-CHAI"

JEN FANG-CHIU

I

Tales of Liao-chai is a Chinese classic. Divided into eight volumes, it comprises four hundred and thirty-one short stories, which were widely circulated after publication. The author, Pu Sung-ling, was a native of Tzuchuan County in Shantung. He was born in 1640 at the end of the Ming Dynasty, and died in 1715 during the Ching Dynasty, at the age of seventy-six. In addition to *Tales of Liao-chai*, he left four volumes of prose, six volumes of verse, and a number of popular folk ballads.

The following is Pu's account of his family background:

> My father Pu Min-wu showed talent in his youth and was fond of study; but he remained a country scholar who gained no recognition. As the family was poor, he gave up study and went in for trade; and in twenty years or so became well off. But when he was over forty and had no son, he stopped trying to make money and stayed at home to study, never leaving his books, until all good scholars praised his learning. He helped the poor, contributed to the building of temples, and neglected his own estate. Then his first wife gave birth to three sons, his second wife to one; and when they reached their teens he taught them himself. Since there were many mouths to feed and little money coming in, however, our family gradually grew poor.

Pu, then, was born into a landlord-merchant family which was no longer prosperous. In his first county examination, he won distinction. But he failed again and again in higher examinations, until finally he stopped taking the examinations and devoted himself to writing.

The four hundred-odd stories in *Tales of Liao-chai* were written over a fairly long period. From the author's preface it is clear that he drew much of his material from folk-lore and popular legends, for he says:

> I have not the talent of a Kan Pao,* but I like collecting tales of the supernatural; and I share the tastes of Su Tung-po,** who enjoyed listening to ghost stories. Each time I hear one, I jot it down, and later write the material up into tales. For a long time, too, friends from different parts of the country have been sending me stories; so my collection is growing all the time.

It may be asked: Why was Pu Sung-ling so fond of ghost stories? Why did he lead such a leisurely, indolent life? To understand this, we must first consider the age in which he lived and his own experiences. When he was five, the Ming Dynasty fell as the result of the Manchu invasion; and during the next seventy years till his death, the national and class struggle were at their fiercest. Though the Manchus had dominated China, they met with continuous resistance from innumerable Chinese patriots. The revolt of Yu Chi in 1661, at Chuyu Mountain in Shantung, was cruelly suppressed by the Manchus when Pu was just over twenty; and this made an indelible impression on him. He had seen for himself the cruelty and horror of foreign domination. Under the strict censorship of the time one careless remark might mean the execution of a whole family. A man could not keep all his thoughts to himself; yet if he spoke freely he was inviting trouble. This is the main reason why Pu was fond of collecting supernatural tales. It also explains why—as he states in his preface—at the risk of being thought mad, he collected and wrote up these tales so enthusiastically: it was to express himself.

His main purpose in amplifying these stories of ghosts, fox-fairies and other marvels with imaginary details was to expose and criticize reality, using fictitious characters to vent his own feelings. Thus these strange tales express certain aspects of real life.

II

Pu Sung-ling lived at the beginning of the Ching Dynasty, but the Manchu government was already corrupt. Since he spent many years in the country in contact with the peasants and led a hard life himself, he was deeply conscious of the injustices of his day and could not refrain from exposing, satirizing and attacking the society of his time.

Many tales in this book describe how the rulers exploited the people. In "Han Fang," for example, to satirize the Ching Dynasty officials who used every pretext to rob the people, Pu narrates how ghosts extorted

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* Writer of the Tsin Dynasty (265-316).
** Poet of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279).

money from the people while on their way to hell. At the end of the story we read:

> In either the thirty-third or thirty-fourth year of Kang Hsi, as I recall it, the authorities decreed a new grain tax, which they called the Voluntary Contribution. The different prefectures and counties also levied additional sums for themselves. Moreover at that time, as a result of flood, the seven counties of North Shantung had a very poor harvest; so it was exceptionally difficult for the peasants to pay up. Mr. Tang of our district, who happened to visit Lichin, saw about a dozen arrested men on the road and stopped to ask what their offence was. "The authorities are taking us to town to make us pay the Voluntary Contribution," they told him. The peasants did not know what Voluntary Contribution meant, and thought it the name for some new form of labour conscription or extortion! This is laughable, but sad too.

Pu often uses characters and incidents in his tales to express his hatred for the ruling class. This is the case in "Cheng the Fairy," where the author's view of contemporary politics is revealed by the fairy's remark: "In this world of robbers, there is no discrimination between right and wrong. Besides, nowadays officials themselves are robbers. Which of them does not act like a highwayman?"

In "Hsi Fang-ping," the corruption and misrule in hell reflect the infamous state of the real world. Let us read the verdict at the end of the story:

> They grasp with their eagles' talons at lucre, regardless of their subjects' poverty; and resort to their monkeys' wiles, though the ghosts are already lean enough. Accepting bribes and misinterpreting the law, they are beasts at heart with merely the semblance of men. . . . They lord it over all, their cur-like faces sterner than frost; then roar and rampage like tigers obstructing the way. Because of their abuse of power, there is none but fears the gaolers of hell; and all dread their henchmen too, who increase the savagery of these corrupt officials.

Again in "A Dream of Wolves," through a supernatural story Pu graphically shows how the officials are tigers and their subordinates wolves, whose sharp fangs reduce the people to heaps of white bones. This story concludes: "Many officials in this world are tigers, and their subordinates wolves. Even if an official is not a tiger, his subordinates may be wolves; and some officials are worse than tigers."

Because Pu hated corrupt officials and their evil subordinates, he expressed sympathy for the rebels who refused to tolerate exploitation and

Li Tang (c. 1090-1160): Gathering Wild Vegetables

oppression any longer, and rose against their rulers. In "A Dream of Wolves" the wicked magistrate has just left his district when he is set upon by robbers. He gives them all his money; but they are not satisfied. "We are here to avenge the wrongs of the people of the whole district," they tell him, "not just to take your money!" And after cutting off his head, they ask which of the retainers is Shih Ta-cheng; for Shih is the magistrate's right-hand man. When the servants point him out, the robbers kill him too.

We also find exposures of the tyranny of the local gentry and landlords, as in this extract from "Tsui Meng."

> There was a rich scholar of the Imperial College named Wang, to whom scoundrels flocked from all over the country. Many well-to-do families in the district were robbed by his men, and any who offended him were murdered on the road. Wang's son was also a cruel, wicked youth. Both he and his father raped Wang's widowed aunt. Because his wife often reproached him, Wang strangled her; and when her brothers took the matter to court, by bribing the magistrate Wang had them convicted of blackmail.

This description shows how in feudal society the landlords, gentry, subordinate officers, magistrates, provincial governors and emperor formed one ruling hierarchy, under the tyranny of which the people groaned.

Pu Sung-ling hated the civil service examinations used by the ruling class to win over intellectuals; so he ridiculed and attacked the whole system. In "Yu Chu-ngo" he shows that scholars who win official posts through the examinations end by knowing nothing, and calls them parrots and turtles who gain office by writing examination essays but have no scholarship at all. In "Wang Tzu-an" a fox makes fun of a scholar who gets drunk while awaiting the results of the examination. The story gives a vivid picture of the psychology of such scholars. At the end of the same tale Pu describes the state of mind of scholars from entering the examination hall until leaving it; from handing in their papers until preparing to sit again. He compares them to beggars, felons, bees at the end of autumn, moulting birds leaving their cage, chained monkeys, snakes losing their poisonous fangs, and pigeons whose eggs have been broken. He draws such a pathetic picture of the scholars' humiliation and degradation that even today we seem to see them with our own eyes.

Pu also likes to describe young lovers, who meet with difficulties but gain their desires at last. Some of his love stories deal with mortal men and women, others with men and fox-fairies, men and fairies, or men and the spirits of insects, birds, flowers and trees. These tales have a realistic setting, and through these romances the author depicts human society. In particular, he sings the praises of those who live and die for love.

Since Pu Sung-ling shared the sense of justice and patriotism of most intellectuals of his time, his dissatisfaction with the tyranny of the

Manchu rulers was natural. He sympathized with Yu Chi's rebellion. In "The Wild Dogs" and "The Ninth Daughter of the Kung-sun Family," though rebellion is not the main theme, we can see that the writer deliberately brings in the government's cruel suppression of the people's uprising. In the first tale he describes a countryman coming home from the mountains, who meets an army marching at night and hides himself among corpses, then recounts the grisly sights he sees. The second story relates how many people in Shantung were involved in Yu Chi's rebellion, and how in one day several hundreds were seized and slaughtered on the parade ground. "The ground was soaked with blood, and white bones thrust up towards the sky."

Pu also ridiculed the Manchu rulers. "The Rakshas and the Sea Market" recounts how a merchant goes to sea and finds a city where hand-some people are persecuted but ugly ones are highly respected; and at the end of the story the moral is clearly drawn. Thus his dissatisfaction with the contemporary political order is very marked. It is said that the *Tales of Liao-chai* was introduced into the palace, but because of its anti-Manchu sentiments it naturally found no favour at court.

Pu Sung-ling's ideas, however, were necessarily limited by his family background, class origin and the age in which he lived. He detested corrupt officials, but he did not realize that this corruption was an outcome of the feudal social system. Since he did not and could not understand this, he dreamed of a Utopia governed by upright officials, under whom the people would lead a happy life. This is the chief reason for his praise of good officials in "Governor Yu," "Solving a Difficult Case," and "Boatmen on Old Dragon River."

As Pu Sung-ling lived near the coast where commerce was highly developed, and his family had engaged in trade, he naturally subscribed to certain ideas of the urban classes. Indeed, this accounts for some of the positive aspects of his work. On the other hand, he was a small landlord who belonged to the lower middle class and was influenced by feudal Confucian conceptions. This constitutes the negative side of his thought. Thus in his writing there is a sharp conflict between the positive and the negative. There is the conflict, for example, between free marriages and the feudal marriages arranged by parents through the medium of go-betweens. There is the conflict between Taoist fatalism and Buddhist ideas of retribution. As a small landlord, Pu was inevitably conservative; as a small merchant, he had his progressive side also. Since both small landlords and small merchants were oppressed by the big landlords, local gentry and corrupt officials, Pu hated all these, and looked forward to the appearance of honest officials. He hated the examination system; but, unable to set aside all longing for position and wealth, he could not help envying some of the men who became successful through this system. Nevertheless, through specific characters and incidents, Pu expresses the feelings and aspirations, ideas and beliefs of his contemporaries, especially

of the small landlords and lower and middle class intellectuals. And this is of great value to us in helping us to understand the society of the early Ching Dynasty and the ideas of those days.

III

Though the style of these tales is highly romantic, their essential spirit is realistic. This is because the author was goaded to write by his dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs. It would be a mistake to consider *Tales of Liao-chai* as simply stories of ghosts, fox-spirits and monsters. Such themes were for the most part chosen as camouflage; for, under the cruel feudal rule with its censorship and persecution of scholars, the author could not express himself freely. Actually, when he describes happenings in hell, these are but reflections of the world of men. Pu Sung-ling condemns and satirizes the abuses of contemporary politics, the corruption of officials, the despotism of the gentry and landlords, both in hell and on earth; and his purpose is to expose and attack such evils. But he is always inclined to make the good characters find happiness and the wicked ones come to a bad end. His stories are therefore highly involved and full of supernatural incidents, and invariably end in such a way as to satisfy his readers and show that heaven will mete out just punishments and rewards. This tends, of course, to limit his realism.

Since Pu Sung-ling's writing is fundamentally realistic, the characters he depicts are true and typical of the society to which he belonged. Hsi Fang-ping, for example, is a filial son, whose characteristics are emphasized by the author. His filial piety is not of the ordinary kind, for he shows extreme courage and determination in avenging his father's wrongs. His father is hated by a rich man, Yang, who, after he dies and becomes a ghost, bribes the runners in hell to beat Hsi's father and kill him. Because of this, Hsi Fang-ping starves himself to death and goes to hell to accuse Yang before the local deity; but the deity has been bribed, and tortures Hsi on a hot iron bed, then has him sawn in half. Still Hsi is undaunted and goes on appealing to higher authorities, until finally he avenges his father.

Other types are the loyal friend in "Tien the Hunter"; the good brothers in "Chang Cheng" and "Tseng Yu-yiu"; the filial daughter-in-law in "San-hu." All these were positive characters in feudal society.

In his characterization Pu Sung-ling succeeds in grasping the chief features of each individual, and so emphasizing them throughout the story that he leaves the reader with a vivid picture in his mind. Take, for example, Sun Tzu-chu in "Ah-pao." From beginning to end his simplicity and single-mindedness are brought out. He may look a little fool-

ish, but in fact he is such an earnest and faithful lover that he finally moves Ah-pao to marry him.

Another characteristic of *Tales of Liao-chai* is its rich imagination. Gods, fairies and ghosts, tree and flower-spirits, heaven and hell, China and foreign lands, the past and the present—all are encompassed in these stories. There are many rapid changes too, when the characters in these tales are transplanted in a flash from heaven to earth. Yet, however strange and miraculous the events, the reader finds them completely human and realistic. In *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Lu Hsun wrote:

> The stories of marvels at the end of the Ming Dynasty are usually so brief and fantastic that they seem incredible. *Tales of Liao-chai* alone contains such detailed descriptions and normal incidents that even flower-spirits and fox-fairies appear human and approachable; but just as we forget that they are not human beings, the author introduces some strange happening to remind us that they are supernatural after all.

Such realism is bound up with the folk origin of these tales. For many of these four hundred-odd stories originated as popular legends, historical tales and contemporary incidents, which Pu collected and rewrote, endowing them with richness and variety. We can say, then, that these tales are the product of folk-lore and Pu Sung-ling's genius. The author does not simply re-tell these tales but uses them to reflect reality. Again, he does not reflect reality in a naturalistic manner, but makes clear his likes and dislikes. He exposes what is evil and praises what is good. He attacks some people and commends others. He looks at life seriously, but holds up all that he detests to ridicule. Moreover, when we consider the society in which he lived, his judgments were akin to those of the masses. He wrote what the people would have liked to say, or what they had said but never committed to writing; thus his words struck a chord in their hearts. And he attained this realism because he inherited not only the best traditions of Chinese folk literature but also those of Chinese classical literature, and developed them further. Thus Pu Sung-ling occupies an important position in the ranks of our classical writers.

TALES OF LIAO-CHAI: A SELECTION

PU SUNG-LING

LAZY WANG

A man called Wang Cheng, scion of an old family in Pingyuan, was so lazy that his property melted away until he had nothing left but a small tumbledown house and was reduced to sharing a tattered quilt with his wife, who never tired of reproaching him. When our story starts, it was the hottest time of summer and many of the villagers—Wang among them—were in the habit of sleeping in the only pavilion left in an old garden which had once belonged to the Chou family, although its walls were now crumbling.

One morning, after all the others had left and the sun was high in the sky, Wang got up and was about to make his way home when his eye fell on a gold hair-pin in the grass; and picking it up he found engraved on it in minute characters "Made for the consort of the princess." Since his grandfather had married into the family of the Prince of Heng, many of Wang's heirlooms had borne this inscription; so he was gazing at the trinket with interest when an old woman came in search of it. And Wang, who though poor was honest, promptly returned it to her. The old woman was delighted, and thanked him for his goodness.

"The pin is not worth much," she said. "But it was left me by my husband."

When Wang inquired who her husband was, she told him: "The former consort of the princess, Wang Chien-chih."

"He was my grandfather!" exclaimed Wang. "Imagine that!"

The old woman was surprised too.

"Are you Wang Chien-chih's grandson?" she cried. "I am a fox fairy, and I was your grandfather's mistress over a hundred years ago; but after he died I left the world. As I was passing here just now, I lost the hair-pin which you picked up. Our meeting must have been ordained by Heaven!"

Since Wang had heard that his grandfather's mistress had been a fox, he believed her and invited her to his house, where he introduced his wife to her. At the sight of Wang's wife—shabby, frowzy and sickly—the old woman sighed.

"To think that Wang Chien-chih's grandson should come to this!" she exclaimed. Then, glancing at the battered, unlit stove, she asked: "How do you manage?"

When Wang's wife, sobbing, had described their poverty, the old woman told her to pawn the hair-pin to buy rice, and promised to come back in three days to see them.

Wang begged her to stay, but the old woman said: "You can't even support your wife. What good would it do for me to stay here without any means of helping you?" So she left.

When Wang told his wife who the old woman was, she was very frightened; but after he reassured her she agreed to treat the fox fairy with the respect due to his grandmother. Three days later, the old woman returned and gave them enough money to buy a hundredweight of rice and wheat. That night she slept on the same couch with Wang's wife, who was at first afraid of her, but soon had her misgivings allayed by the old woman's kindness.

The next day the old woman said to Wang: "You should stop loafing, grandson, and go into some small business. How can you sit idle at home?"

When Wang objected that he had no capital, she replied: "During your grandfather's lifetime, I could have had all the silver I wanted; but since I was not of this world I had no need for money, so I accepted very little from him. I did set aside forty taels as pin-money though, which I still have. It is no use in my keeping, so you had better take it to buy linen. For if you go to the capital at once, you will make a profit."

Acting on her advice, Wang bought more than fifty lengths of linen. Then the old woman bade him start at once, calculating that he would reach the capital in six or seven days.

"Look sharp and bestir yourself!" she urged him. "If you lose one day, you will be sorry for it."

Wang assented, packed up his goods and left. But half-way to the capital he was caught in a storm and soaked to the skin; and, since this was his first experience of the hardships of travel, he felt quite exhausted and stopped at an inn to rest. The rain, however, poured down all night, cascading off the eaves of the inn; and by the next day the road was a morass. When he saw passers-by ankle-deep in mud, he was afraid to venture out and waited till noon. By then the road was drier, but dark clouds gathered again and another downpour made him delay continuing his journey till the following day. As he approached the capital, he heard to his great joy that linen was at a premium; but when he reached the metropolis and set down his baggage in an inn, the innkeeper told him he had come too late. The road to the south had only just been opened, and very little linen had been coming to the north; and since many rich families in the capital wished to buy it, the price had soared to about three times the normal figure. The day before Wang's arrival, however,

such a large consignment of linen had arrived that the price suddenly dropped, and late-comers lost their market. This news was a great blow to Wang.

The next day, as more linen arrived, the price dropped further; and Wang, unable to make a satisfactory profit, would not sell. About ten days later, though, when he realized how much he had spent on board and lodging, he felt quite sick with worry; so when the innkeeper advised him to sell cheap and invest his money in some other business, he agreed. He sold all his stock, losing more than ten taels in the transaction.

The next morning, having got up and made ready to leave, he opened his purse only to find all his money gone! In consternation he told the innkeeper, who did not know what to do. But when someone advised Wang to file a suit against the innkeeper to demand that he make good the loss, the young man said with a sigh: "This is my bad luck. The manager is not to blame."

The grateful innkeeper gave him five taels of silver and urged him to go home; but Wang felt unable to face his grandmother. As he was wandering about aimlessly, unable to make up his mind, he saw some men training quails to fight. One lucky wager, and a man could win several thousand cash, while each quail sold at more than a hundred cash. Wang was very tempted, and his money was just enough for him to trade in these birds. He consulted the innkeeper, who encouraged him and promised him free board and lodging; so Wang went off rejoicing and bought a whole load of quails. On his return to the city, the innkeeper admired the birds and prophesied that he would soon sell them.

It poured with rain all that night, and when dawn broke the streets were flooded and the rain was still coming down. Wang waited for the weather to clear, but the downpour continued without intermission for several days, and when he examined his quails he found that they were dying off. He was filled with consternation, but did not know what to do. By the following day, even more quails had died. Wang put the few that were left in one cage; but the next day, when he went to look at them, only one quail had survived! Tears sprang to his eyes as he told the innkeeper what had happened; and the good man pitied him with all his heart. Now that all his money was spent and he could not return home, Wang wanted to commit suicide; but the innkeeper comforted him, and went with him to look at the remaining quail.

"This seems a fine bird," said the innkeeper as he examined it. "It's possible that this quail killed the others. Since you have nothing to do anyway, why not train this quail? If it turns out well, you can make a living out of it."

Wang took his advice, and when the bird was trained the innkeeper bade him take it to the street corner to gamble for wine and meat. The quail proved such a good fighter that it won in every encounter; and the innkeeper was so pleased that he lent Wang money to stake with the other

young fellows. Wang won every time. In little more than six months, overjoyed to find that he had made twenty taels of silver, he prized this quail as much as his own life.

Now one of the princes loved quail-fighting, and admitted quail-fanciers to his palace every year at the Lantern Festival to pit their birds against his.

"With any luck," said the innkeeper to Wang, "you may make your fortune." He told him about the prince and accompanied him to the palace, saying: "If you lose, just go away and forget about it. But if by any chance your quail wins, the prince will certainly want to buy it. And if that happens, see that you don't agree too readily. If he insists, just watch me, and only consent to a price when I nod." To this Wang assented.

When they reached the prince's palace, they found a crowd of quail-trainers jostling each other in the courtyard; and presently the prince came out to take his seat in the hall and his attendants announced that competitors might step forward. As one man advanced with his quail, the prince ordered his bird to be released; but at the first stroke the stranger's quail was beaten, and the prince laughed.

When several others had been beaten, the innkeeper whispered: "Now's our time." So they ascended the steps.

"This is a fine bird," said the prince, looking at Wang's quail. "It has angry veins in its eyes. Here is a worthy opponent!" He ordered his men to bring out Iron Beak to fight it. After one or two pecks, however, Iron Beak was defeated; and when the prince sent for a better bird, it was beaten too.

On his mettle now, the prince ordered Jade Bird to be fetched from the palace; and in a short time it arrived. This quail's feathers were white as an egret's, and it was such a spirited, kingly bird that Wang lost heart. Falling on his knees, he begged to be excused this encounter.

"Your Highness has such a rare bird," he said, "I am afraid it will kill my quail, and then I shall have nothing to live on."

But the prince only laughed.

"Come on," he said. "If your bird is killed, I shall pay you well."

Then Wang let go of his quail. As Jade Bird rushed forward, Wang's quail crouched down like an angry cock to await its coming; but when Jade Bird struck, Wang's quail rose like a soaring crane to beat it off. So they fought backwards and forwards for some time, until Jade Bird began to flag. Wang's quail, however, became more enraged and fought more violently than ever, till Jade Bird's snowy feathers were flying in all directions, and finally it fled with drooping wings amid the cheers of hundreds of spectators.

Then the prince asked for Wang's quail, took it in his hand and examined its beak and claws carefully.

"Will you sell this bird?" he asked.

"Your servant has no other means of livelihood," replied Wang. "I don't want to part with it."

"Suppose I give you a handsome price for it, so that you can make a good living?"

After long thought, Wang answered: "I never meant to sell. But if Your Highness has taken such a fancy to the bird and will see that I can support my family, I don't mind parting with it."

The prince told him to name a price, and he asked for a thousand taels of silver.

"You fool!" said the prince with a laugh. "What treasure is this to be worth a thousand taels?"

"This may seem no treasure to Your Highness," countered Wang, "but to me it is priceless."

"How so?"

"By taking this bird to the market, I can make a few taels every day and buy enough rice to feed a dozen mouths. What treasure can compare with that?"

"You won't be the loser," declared the prince. "I'll give you two hundred taels for it."

When Wang shook his head, the prince raised the price by another hundred. Wang looked at the innkeeper, but his friend made no sign.

"With Your Highness' permission," said Wang, "I'll knock off one hundred."

"Go on!" cried the prince. "Who's going to spend nine hundred taels on a quail?"

Wang put his quail in his bag and made as if to leave.

"Hey! Come back!" called the prince. "Come back, and I'll give you six hundred. You can take it or leave it."

Wang looked at the innkeeper again, but there was still no nod from him. The young man was more than satisfied, however, with this offer; and was afraid of missing this chance if he refused.

"I am really reluctant to sell at such a price," he said. "But I don't want to offend Your Highness. Six hundred let it be."

The delighted prince immediately weighed out the money, and Wang, pocketing it, thanked him and took his leave.

"Why didn't you listen to me?" demanded the innkeeper. "Had you bargained a little more, you'd have got eight hundred."

Back in the inn, Wang put the silver on the table and asked the innkeeper to take his share; but the good man refused. Only when Wang insisted did the innkeeper accept payment for his board.

Wang then packed up and went home, where he told his story and produced his silver. They all rejoiced, and the old woman advised him to buy fifty acres of good land, build a house and settle down respectably with his wife. She rose early each morning and ordered Wang to supervise the farm hands and his wife the maids at their spinning; and she

would scold them if they idled. Then husband and wife worked well and cheerfully, and in three years, when they had become fairly prosperous, the old woman announced that she must leave them. With tears in their eyes they begged her to stay, and she consented; but the following day at dawn she had disappeared.

The recorder of these marvels comments: Wealth springs from industry, and this singular case of wealth achieved through idleness is surely unique. Yet Wang when penniless remained honest; and this must be why Heaven spurned him at first to take pity on him in the end. How otherwise could a lazy man become rich?

TIEN THE HUNTER

Wu Cheng-hsiu, a native of Liaoyang, had a great partiality for high society.

He dreamed one night that a man came to him and said: "Although you have acquaintances in all parts of the country, they are fair-weather friends. You have not met the one man who would stand by you through thick and thin."

"Who may that be?" inquired Wu.

"Tien Chi-lang."

Wu awoke marvelling. In the morning when he met his friends he questioned them about Tien Chi-lang, and learning that the man was a hunter in the east village he called at Tien's house, knocking on the door with the stock of his whip. Presently a man in his twenties came out: lynx-eyed, well-knit, wearing a grease-stained jerkin and black cotton breeches patched in a number of places with white. Raising clasped hands in salutation to his forehead, he asked Wu whence he came. And Wu, having made himself known and declared that he had been seized with dizziness while walking, requested permission to rest there a while, and asked if his host knew Tien Chi-lang.

"I am he," was the reply.

Then the young man conducted him in through several ramshackle rooms, their walls supported by props, to a small chamber hung with tiger and wolf skins but void of any couch or seat. Tien spread a tiger skin on the ground, however, on which they sat; and, upon entering into conversation with the youth, Wu was delighted to find him simple and unaffected. He offered Tien money as capital for a small business, but the hunter declined; and, when Wu insisted, Tien took the gold in to his mother, only to return shortly and refuse once more. Upon Wu's pressing him repeatedly to accept, Tien's mother hobbled in.

"I have only this one son," she said sharply. "I don't want him to serve any lord."

Wu left in confusion, and on the way home cast about in vain to understand this rejection of his offer until one of his attendants, who had overheard the old woman speaking to her son, told him the reason. It seems that when Tien took the gold in to his mother, she said:

"That gentleman, whom I caught sight of just now, has an unlucky cast of features. This means that trouble must await him. They say that, if anyone befriends you, you should share his sorrows and help him in all his difficulties; but while a rich man can repay kindness with money, a poor man has only his loyalty. It bodes no good to be given a rich gift which you have not deserved, for then you may have to pay for it with your life."

Admiration for the old woman's discernment only increased Wu's respect for Tien: so the next day he invited the young man to a feast, but Tien declined. When Wu went back to their house, however, and sitting down asked for a drink, Tien poured him wine, offered him dried venison and treated him with all courtesy. And the following day, when Wu sent him another invitation, the hunter accepted. Still, despite the pleasure they took in each other's company, Tien again refused his friend's attempt to press gold upon him, accepting it only when Wu insisted that he wanted to buy some tiger skins.

Once home and examining his stock of skins, though, Tien found he had not enough to send, and decided to make another hunting trip. He spent three days in the hills without catching anything; then his wife fell ill, and the preparation of physic for her left him no leisure for anything else; while by the time his wife died, ten days later, and had to be buried with due Buddhist rituals, most of the money given him had melted away. Wu came in person to offer condolences and bring lavish presents; so, after his wife's funeral, Tien went back with his crossbow to the hills, determined to show his gratitude to his friend. But again he caught nothing.

Wu, hearing of this, urged the hunter to set his mind at rest and call to see him. Tien, however, conscious of being under an obligation, would not go. Then Wu asked to see his stock of tiger skins, so that the hunter would have no excuse to remain away. But Tien, looking through his skins, found them so moth-eaten and damaged that his heart sank even lower.

As soon as Wu learned of this, he went to his friend's house to comfort him.

"These are good enough for my purpose," he said, looking at the spoiled skins. "The condition of the fur is immaterial."

So he took the skins and asked Tien to accompany him home; but the hunter declined, and Wu had to return alone. Still ashamed to be so much in Wu's debt, Tien took rations for some days to the hills, where,

after several nights' vigil, he succeeded in killing a tiger which he presented whole to his friend. Wu, greatly pleased, invited him to a meal and begged him to spend three days as his guest; indeed, upon Tien's trying to excuse himself, Wu had his front gate locked so that the hunter could not leave.

Since Tien was shabby and uncouth, the other guests whispered that Wu was conferring his friendship too far beneath him; yet Wu continued to show special respect to the hunter. He changed Tien's clothing while he was asleep, so that the young man had perforce to accept a gift of new clothes which he had at first refused. And when, having returned home, Tien came back with instructions from his mother to return the new clothes and ask for his old ones again, Wu simply laughed.

"Tell your respected mother," he said, "that I have already torn up the old ones to make shoe linings."

Consequently, Tien sent rabbits and venison every day to Wu, but declined all invitations.

One day, when Wu called on the young man only to find him out hunting, Tien's mother came to the door.

"Will you stop making up to my son!" she cried. "Do you want to destroy him?"

Wu bowed and left, covered with shame.

Six months later, Wu's servants told him that Tien had been arrested for killing another hunter who had disputed his possession of a leopard. Greatly alarmed, Wu went at once to the gaol, where he found his friend in chains.

"Please look after my mother!" was all the hunter said.

Leaving with a heavy heart, Wu lost no time in bribing the magistrate with a large sum and the plaintiff with a hundred taels of silver, so that after a month the matter was hushed up and Tien released.

"You owe your life to Mr. Wu," said Tien's mother, deeply moved. "I have no right to keep you away from him any more. My one prayer is that he may enjoy a long and peaceful life, for that will mean good fortune for you too."

When Tien declared that he must go to thank Wu, his mother told him: "Go if you wish; but don't thank him. You can thank a man for a small favour, but not when you owe him so much."

Accordingly, when Tien saw Wu and his patron spoke kindly to him, the hunter merely mumbled a brief reply. All Wu's household thought the young man most remiss; but Wu, touched by his sincerity, showed him even greater favour. After this, Tien stayed with Wu every few days and would accept any present given him, nor did he ever speak of repaying his benefactor's kindness.

On Wu's birthday one year, the house was so filled with guests that Wu and Tien shared one room, while three servants slept on the floor beside the bed. After the servants were asleep the two friends went

on chatting till nearly midnight when, with a flash like lightning, Tien's sword, which was hanging on the wall, leapt clanging out of its scabbard. Wu was terrified, and Tien started up to ask who the sleepers on the floor were. Wu told him that these were servants.

"One of them must be a bad man," said Tien.

"Why do you say that?"

"My grandfather bought this sword when he was abroad," replied Tien. "It is so sharp that blood flows straight off it. This sword has been in our family for three generations and chopped off over a thousand heads, yet its blade remains as sharp as ever; and in the presence of anyone wicked it will always leap out of its scabbard. That means that it will shortly kill someone. I advise you to keep good company and avoid evil-doers, in order to steer clear of trouble."

Even after Wu had agreed, however, Tien still tossed and turned on the bed, unable to sleep for anxiety.

"Good fortune or bad depends upon fate," said Wu. "Why should you let this prey on your mind?"

"I have no fear for myself," answered Tien. "But I am concerned for my mother."

"Are you not being over-pessimistic?" demanded Wu.

"Indeed," replied Tien, "I hope so."

The three servants on the floor were: Ling-erh, an old steward who was his master's favourite; a boy of about twelve who acted as Wu's page; and a mulish fellow called Li Ying, who had incurred his master's dislike by his habit of answering back. After pondering the matter, Wu convinced himself that Li Ying was a scoundrel; so the next morning he called the fellow to him and dismissed him as tactfully as he could.

Now Wu's eldest son had married a girl from the Wang clan. One day, when Wu was out and his steward Ling-erh was in charge of the study, the young bride, thinking that the courtyard of the study should be deserted in her father-in-law's absence, went out to pluck some of the chrysanthemums which were then in bloom. To her came Ling-erh suddenly, and tried to seduce her; and, when she attempted to escape, he seized her and dragged her into the study. White with terror, the young woman resisted, screaming and shouting herself hoarse until her husband rushed in, whereupon Ling-erh released her and fled. Upon Wu's return he heard of this and called furiously for Ling-erh; but the steward had disappeared.

Two or three days later, Wu discovered that his steward had taken refuge in the house of an imperial censor, who had left his household in the care of his younger brother while he stayed at his post in the capital. As a fellow official, Wu wrote to the censor's brother to demand Ling-erh's return; but his request was ignored. Growing more incensed, he appealed to the local magistrate; but though a warrant for Ling-erh's

arrest was issued, the runners did not apprehend him, and the magistrate let the matter drop. Wu was fuming with anger when Tien called.

"Your prediction has come true!" Wu told him, then related all that had happened.

Turning pale, Tien left without a word.

Wu had ordered capable servants to watch Ling-erh's movements; and one evening, when the steward was returning to the censor's house, they caught him and haled him before Wu, who had him beaten. Still Ling-erh hurled insults at his master, and Wu's uncle, a level-headed old gentleman who feared that his nephew might kill the steward in his rage and so get into trouble, advised him to have Ling-erh punished by law. Wu agreed. But no sooner did he have the fellow bound and sent to the court than a letter reached the yamen from the censor's house and the magistrate promptly released Ling-erh, who was taken away by the censor's servants. Indeed, emboldened by his release, the insolent steward shouted to all around that he had had an affair with his mistress.

Helpless and well nigh bursting with fury, Wu swore and stormed at the censor's gate until neighbours persuaded him to go home. The following night, Wu was surprised to learn from his men that Ling-erh had been cut to pieces by an unknown assassin and his body thrown on some waste land. This news made him feel a little better. The censor's family, however, immediately accused Wu and his uncle of murder, and they had to appear before the magistrate who gave them no chance to plead their innocence, but ordered Wu's uncle to be beaten.

"We have killed no one!" shouted Wu. "It is true that I swore at the censor's household; but that had nothing to do with my uncle."

"Still the magistrate ignored him completely; and when, convulsed with rage, Wu tried to rush forward, the court runners seized him by the hair. The runners who beat Wu's uncle with the bastinado were in the censor's pay, and the old man was weak, so before half the strokes had been given he was dead; and the magistrate, seeing this, declared the case closed, paying no attention to Wu's cries and curses. All Wu could do was to take the body home.

Between grief and indignation he did not know what to do, and wanted to consult Tien. But the hunter did not come to offer his condolences. Wu wondered why, after accepting such favours from him, Tien should now treat him as a stranger, and suspected that it was the hunter who had killed the steward. If that were the case, they should certainly put their heads together; so he sent messengers to Tien's house, but they found the door locked and the neighbours could give them no news of the young man.

One morning soon after this, the censor's brother called to see the magistrate on business just at the time for the daily delivery of fuel and water. A woodcutter suddenly came up to them, set down his load, and drawing a sharp sword rushed at the two officials. Terrified, the

censor's brother threw up his arm to ward off the blow. But the sword severed his wrist, and with another stroke his head was cut off! Meanwhile the magistrate had fled in terror, and while the woodcutter was searching franticly for him the runners and secretaries shut the yamen gate, raised an alarm and closed in with weapons; whereupon the assassin killed himself. When they gathered round to look at the dead man, they found he was none other than Tien.

The magistrate, having recovered from his fright and gone out to view the corpse, saw Tien lying dead in a pool of blood, his sword in his hand. But as the wicked official stooped down for a closer look, the corpse leapt up and cut off his head, then fell to the ground again. The authorities sent runners to arrest Tien's mother, only to find that she had vanished several days previously.

Upon hearing of Tien's death, Wu went immediately to mourn beside the corpse. Everyone declared that he must have been behind this, and he had to spend his fortune bribing the officials concerned in order to remain at liberty. Tien's corpse was left in the wilderness for more than thirty days, where it was guarded by birds and dogs until Wu took it away to give it a fine burial.

Tien's son moved to Tengchow and changed his surname to Tung. Starting as a soldier, and rising through merit to the post of sub-prefect and lieutenant, he returned at last to Liaoyang where Wu, then over eighty, showed him his father's grave.

The recorder of these marvels comments: Only those who will not accept one coin they have not deserved will remember each and every act of kindness. How wise Tien's mother proved! And how miraculous that Tien, who killed himself before all the wrongs were avenged, could slay his enemy after death! Had Ching Ko* been able to do this, all would have been well. With such men in the world, we need not fear that Heaven will overlook wrong-doers. It is a pity, though, that there are few men like Tien the hunter on this wicked earth!

THE RAKSHAS AND THE SEA MARKET

Ma Chun, whose other name was Lung-mei, was the son of a merchant. A handsome, unconventional lad, he loved singing and dancing; and his habit of mixing with actors and wearing a silk handkerchief on his head made him look as beautiful as a girl and won him the nickname

*Ching Ko was a famous assassin who tried to kill the first emperor of the Chin Dynasty in order to avenge his lord, but failed. See *Chinese Literature*, No. 4, 1955, p. 94.

Handsome. At the age of fourteen he entered the prefectural school, where he was winning quite a name for himself when his father, growing old, decided to retire.

"Son," said the old man, "books cannot fill your belly or put a coat on your back. You had better follow your father's trade."

Ma, accordingly, turned his hand to business.

While on a sea voyage with other traders, Ma was carried off by a typhoon. After several days and nights he reached a city where all the inhabitants were appallingly ugly; yet at the sight of him they exclaimed in horror and fled as if he were a monster. At first Ma was alarmed by their hideous looks; but as soon as he discovered that they were even more afraid of him, he made the most of their fear. Wherever he found them eating or drinking he would rush upon them, and when they scattered in alarm he would regale himself upon all they left.

Later, Ma made his way to a mountain village where the people showed more resemblance to human beings. But they were a ragged, beggarly lot. As he rested under a tree, the villagers gazed at him from a distance, not daring to approach; but realizing after some time that he would not eat them, they began to draw nearer, and Ma addressed them with a smile. Although they spoke different tongues, each side could understand something of what the other said. And when Ma told them that he came from China, the villagers were pleased and spread the news that this stranger was not a cannibal after all. The ugliest of them, however, would turn away after one look at Ma, not daring to draw near. Those who did go up to him had features not entirely different from the Chinese; and as they brought him food and wine Ma asked why they were so afraid of him.

"We were told by our forefathers," they answered, "that nearly nine thousand miles to our west is a country called China inhabited by the most extraordinary-looking race. We knew this by hearsay only before; but you have provided proof of it."

Asked the reason for their poverty, they replied: "In our country we value beauty, not literary accomplishments. Our most handsome men are appointed ministers, those coming next are made governors and magistrates, while the third class have noble patrons and receive handsome pensions for the support of their families. But we are considered as freaks at birth, and our parents nearly always abandon us, only keeping us in order to continue the family line."

When Ma inquired the name of their country, they told him that it was The Great Kingdom of Rakshas, and that their capital lay about ten miles to the north. And upon Ma's expressing a desire to be conducted there, they set off with him the next day at cock-crow and reached the city at dawn. The city walls were made of stone as black as ink, with towers and pavilions a hundred feet high. Red stones were used for tiles,

and picking up a fragment of one Ma found that it marked his finger-nail just like vermilion. They arrived as the court was rising, in time to see the official equipages. The villagers pointed out the prime minister, and Ma saw that his ears drooped forward in flaps, he had three nostrils, and his eyelashes covered his eyes like a screen. He was followed by some riders whom the villagers said were privy councillors. They informed Ma of each man's rank; and, although all the officials were ugly, the lower their rank the less hideous they were.

When Ma turned to leave, the citizens of the capital exclaimed in terror and started flying in all directions as if he were an ogre. Only when the villagers assured them that there was nothing to be afraid of did these city people dare stand at a distance to watch. By the time he got back, however, there was not a man, woman or child in the country but knew that a man-monster was there; so all the gentry and officials were curious to see him and asked the villagers to fetch him. But whatever house he went to, the gate-keeper would slam the door in his face, while men and women alike dared only peep at him through cracks and comment on him in whispers. Not a single one had the courage to invite him in.

Then the villagers told him: "There is a captain of the imperial guard here who was sent abroad on a number of missions by our late king. He has seen so much that he may not be afraid of you."

So they called on the captain, and he was genuinely pleased to meet Ma, treating him as an honoured guest. Ma saw that his host, who looked like a man of ninety, had protruding eyes and a beard like a hedgehog's.

"In my youth," said the captain, "His Majesty sent me to many countries, but never to China. Now at the age of one hundred and twenty, I have been fortunate enough to meet one from your honourable country! I must report this to the king. Living in retirement, I have not been to the court for more than ten years; but I will go there for your sake early tomorrow morning."

He plied Ma with food and drink, showing him every courtesy. After they had drunk a few cups of wine, a dozen girls came in to dance and sing in turn. They looked like devils, but wore white silk turbans and long red dresses which trailed on the ground; and Ma, who could not understand the performance or the songs, found the music weird in the extreme. His host, however, listened appreciatively and asked eventually whether China could boast equally fine music. Receiving an affirmative answer, the old man begged him to sing a few bars. So, beating time on the table, Ma obliged with a tune.

"How strange!" exclaimed the captain, delighted. "It is like the cries of phoenixes or dragons. I have never heard anything resembling this before."

The following day the old man went to the court to recommend Ma to the king, who decided to summon him for an audience. But when two ministers declared that Ma's revolting appearance might shock His Majesty, the king changed his mind. The captain, quite upset, returned to tell Ma of the failure of his mission.

One day, after Ma had stayed with the captain for some time, under the influence of wine he smeared his face with coal dust to perform a sword dance in the role of Chang Fei.*

"You must appear before the prime minister with your face painted like that," urged the captain, who admired this disguise immensely. "He is sure to patronize you, and will certainly procure you a big salary."

"It is all very well to disguise oneself in fun," protested Ma with a laugh. "But how can I play the hypocrite for the sake of personal gain?"

He gave in, however, when his host insisted.

Then the captain invited a number of high officials to a banquet, and bade Ma paint his face in readiness. When the guests arrived and Ma was called out to meet them, they were all amazed.

"How strange!" they cried. "He used to be so ugly; but now he is quite handsome."

Drinking together, they were soon on the best of terms; and when Ma danced and sang country tunes, they were delighted. The very next day they recommended him to the king, who summoned him to court to question him about the government of China. And his diplomatic answers pleased the king so much that a feast was held in Ma's honour in the pleasure palace.

"I hear that you are skilled in music," said the king as they were drinking. "Will you perform for me?"

Ma immediately rose to dance and sing vulgar tunes, wearing a white turban in imitation of the girls; and the king was so amused that he promptly appointed him a privy councillor, thereafter dining with him frequently and showing him extraordinary favour.

As time went on, however, the other officials realized that Ma's face was painted. Wherever he went, people would whisper behind his back or treat him coldly; and such isolation made him uneasy. He addressed a memorial to the throne, requesting permission to retire; but the king refused, granting him only three months' leave. Ma then went back in a carriage loaded with gold and jewels to the mountain village, where the villagers welcomed him on their knees; and, amid thunderous applause, he distributed his wealth among his old friends.

"We are humble people," they said, "yet Your Grace has treated us so kindly! When we go to the Sea Market, we shall look for some precious objects to repay you."

*A famous general in the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280). He is represented on the traditional stage as a man with a dark face and long whiskers.

Ma asked where this market was.

"It is a market in the middle of the ocean," they told him, "where mermaids from all the seas bring their jewels and merchants from all the twelve countries around come to trade. Deities frolic there among the coloured clouds and tossing waves; but rich men and high officials will not risk the journey, commissioning us to buy treasures for them instead. The time for the market is at hand."

"How do you know the date?" demanded Ma.

They explained that red birds flew over the ocean seven days before the market; but when Ma asked them when they were going to start, and whether he might go with them, the villagers begged him not to take such a risk.

"I am a sailor," protested Ma. "The wind and waves hold no fears for me."

Soon after this, people came with money to buy goods, then the villagers loaded their wares and boarded a vessel capable of carrying several dozen men. This was a flat-bottomed boat surrounded by a high railing; and with ten men at the oars it cut through the water like an arrow. After a voyage of three days they could make out in the distance, between the moving clouds and water, pavilions rising one behind the other and busy traffic of trading junks. By and by they came to a city, which had walls made of bricks as long as a man's body, and a citadel towering to the sky. Here they moored their boat and went ashore to inspect the treasure displayed in the market—precious stones which dazzled the eye, seldom seen in the world of men.

Then a young man rode up, and all the market people hastened to make way for him, crying that this was the Third Prince of Tungyang. The prince's eye fell on Ma as he passed, and he exclaimed:

"This stranger is not from these parts!"

Some of his outriders came to ask Ma where he hailed from; and Ma, bowing at the roadside, told them.

"A kind fate has favoured us with your visit!" cried the prince with a smile. He gave Ma a horse and bade him ride with them out of the West Gate. Upon reaching the shore, their steeds neighed and leapt into the waves; but as Ma cried out in dread the sea parted to form a wall of water on either side; and presently a palace came into sight. It had rafters of tortoise shell and tiles of fish scales, while its dazzling walls of bright crystal reflected all around. Here they dismounted, and Ma was led into the presence of the dragon king who was seated on his throne.

"In the market I came across a talented man from China," the prince reported. "I have brought him here to Your Majesty."

Ma stepped forward to bow to the ground.

"You are a great scholar, sir," said the dragon king, "not inferior to Chu Yuan, Sung Yu and other poets of old. May I ask you to compose a poem on our Sea Market? Pray do not refuse."

Having bowed his agreement, Ma was given a crystal inkstone, dragon's beard brush, paper as white as snow, and ink as fragrant as orchids. Without hesitation he dashed off over one thousand characters which he presented to the dragon king, who marked the rhythm with one hand as he read the poem.

"Your genius sheds glory on our watery kingdom, sir," said the king.

He then summoned all his dragon kinsmen to feast at the Palace of Rosy Clouds, and, when the wine had circulated freely, raising a goblet in one hand he said to Ma: "My beloved daughter is still unmarried. I would like to entrust her to you, if you have no objection."

Ma rose, blushing, and stammered out his thanks. At once the dragon king gave an order to his attendants, and presently palace maids led in the princess whose jade pendants tinkled as she walked. Trumpets and drums sounded for the wedding ceremony, and Ma, stealing a look at his bride, found her divinely beautiful. After the ceremony the princess left the hall; and, the feast at an end, two maids holding painted candles led Ma into the inner palace. There the princess was sitting, magnificently arrayed. The bridal bed was of coral, studded with jewels, the curtains were adorned with coloured feathers and decked with huge pearls, and the bedding was soft and scented.

The next morning at dawn, when girl attendants entered to offer their services, Ma got up and went to thank the king. He was duly installed as the royal son-in-law and appointed an official; copies of his poem were despatched to all the seas, and the dragon rulers of the different oceans sent special envoys to convey their congratulations to the king and invite Ma to feast with them. Then, in embroidered robes and riding on a green-horned dragon, he sallied forth with a magnificent equipage, accompanied by dozens of knights on horseback who carried carved bows and white staffs. They formed a glittering cavalcade, with musicians on horseback and in chariots playing harps and jade flutes. Thus in three days Ma passed through the different seas, and his fame spread throughout the marine world.

In the palace grew a jade tree, so large that a man could barely encircle it with his arms. The trunk was as transparent as glass and pale yellow in the centre; the branches were slighter than a human arm; and the jasper leaves, little thicker than a coin, cast a fine checkered shade. Ma and his bride often recited poems under this tree, which bore a profusion of blossoms like gardenias. Whenever a petal fell it made a tinkling sound, and picked up proved to be as lovely and bright as carved red agate. Often a strange bird would come to sing here. Its feathers were gold and green, its tail longer than its entire body, and its flute-like voice so clear and plaintive that none who heard it could fail to be moved. Whenever Ma listened to its song, he was carried back in spirit to his native land.

"I have been away from my home and my beloved parents for three years," he told the princess. "The thought of this makes tears well to my eyes and perspiration start out on my back. Will you accompany me home?"

"An immortal must not live like a mortal," she replied. "I cannot go with you, but neither would I let the love of husband and wife stand in the way of your love for your parents. Let us consider this again later."

Hearing this, Ma could not refrain from tears, and the princess sighed.

"It is clear that you cannot have both wife and parents," she said.

Next day, when Ma returned to the palace from an outing, the dragon king addressed him.

"I hear that you are longing for your home," he said. "Would you like to leave tomorrow?"

Ma thanked the king earnestly.

"Your servant came here as a stranger," he said, "yet you have conferred such honours upon me that I am overwhelmed with gratitude. I shall go to pay my family a short visit, but I hope to return again."

That evening when the princess prepared a parting feast, Ma spoke once more of his proposed return.

"Ah, no," said she. "We can never meet again."

Ma, hearing this, was overcome with grief.

"To go back to your parents shows true filial piety," the princess assured him. "Fate holds endless encounters and separations, and a hundred years pass like a single day; then why should we give way to tears like children? I mean to remain true to you, and I am sure you will be faithful to me. Loving each other in far distant places, we can still be one in spirit: there is no need to remain together morning and night. If you break this pledge, your next marriage will be unlucky; but if you need someone to look after you, you can take a maid as your concubine. I have something to ask you, too. I am now with child, and I would like you to choose a name for it."

"If it is a girl," said Ma, "call her Dragon Palace. If a boy, Happy Sea."

Then the princess asked him for a token, and he gave her a pair of red cornelian lilies he had obtained in the land of the Rakshas.

"Three years from now, on the eighth day of the fourth moon," she charged him, "sail into the south sea and I shall give you your child." Then she handed him a fish-scale bag filled with jewels, saying: "Keep this well. It will support your family for generations."

At dawn the dragon king held a farewell feast for Ma and bestowed many other gifts on him, after which Ma bid them all adieu and left the palace, escorted by the princess in a carriage drawn by white rams. But as soon as he reached the ocean's shore and dismounted the princess said farewell and turned swiftly away, the salt waves closing over her as she disappeared. Then Ma returned home.

Everybody believed that Ma had been lost at sea, so his family was amazed at his return. His parents were well, but his wife had married again; and Ma realized that when the dragon princess had spoken of keeping faith, she must have known this. His father urged him to marry another wife, but he refused, taking only a concubine. He kept in mind the date, and three years later sailed south again until he saw two children on the ocean's bosom, gambolling and frolicking upon the waves. As he drew near and leant over them, one child seized his arm with a laugh and leapt on to his knee, while the other cried out as if to reproach him for neglecting it. When he had pulled the second child aboard too, he saw that one was a boy and the other a girl. They were beautiful children. Fastened to their coloured hats were his red cornelian lilies, and on the boy's back he found an embroidered bag containing the following letter:

I know that your parents are well. Three years have slipped quickly away while we have been separated by the ocean, with no bluebird to carry our messages. I long for you in my dreams, gazing in grief at the azure sky. Yet even the goddess of the moon pines in loneliness under the cassia tree, and the Weaving Maid grieves as she watches the Milky Way which separates her from her love. Why should I alone enjoy wedded happiness? This thought makes me smile at my tears. Two months after you left I gave birth to twins, who can now prattle and laugh in my lap, and hunt for dates and pears. Since they can manage without a mother now, I am sending them to you; and you will know them by the red cornelian lilies which you gave me. When you take them on your knee, you may imagine that I am beside you. It comforts me to know that you have kept faith; and I too shall remain true to you until death. I no longer rouge or powder my face or darken my eyebrows before the mirror. You are the wanderer and I the loving wife at home; but even though we cannot be together, we remain husband and wife. I feel it is wrong, though, that your parents should have their grandchildren without meeting their daughter-in-law; so next year when your mother leaves the world, I shall come to the burial and pay my respects. After that, if all goes well with Dragon Palace it may be possible to meet again; and if Happy Sea remains well, a path may be found for a visit. Please take good care of yourself. This letter cannot express all that I want to say.

Ma read and reread this letter, weeping, until the two children put their arms around his neck and said: "Father! Can we go home?"

Pierced to the heart, he fondled them, asking: "Where is our home?"

The children whimpered, and cried for their mother. And Ma gazed at the wild expanse of ocean stretching boundless to the horizon; but no princess appeared, nor any road through the misty waves. There was nothing for it but to take the children home.

Knowing now that his mother's death was near, Ma made everything ready for her funeral, and planted a hundred pine trees in the ancestral graveyard. The next year, when his mother died and the interment took place, a woman appeared beside the grave in deep mourning. As they gazed at her in wonder, a wind sprang up, thunder crashed and rain poured down, and the woman disappeared. But many of the pine trees planted by Ma, which had withered, revived after this rain.

When Happy Sea grew bigger, he still missed his mother; and once he disappeared suddenly into the sea, returning only several days later. But Dragon Palace, being a girl, could not leave home; and she often wept in her room. One day the sky grew dark, and the dragon princess entered Ma's house to comfort her daughter.

"You will have your own home soon," she said. "Don't cry, child."

She gave the girl as her dowry a tree of coral eight feet high, a packet of Baroos camphor, a hundred pearls and two gold boxes set with precious stones. When Ma heard of her coming, he rushed in and took her hands, weeping. But with a clap of thunder the princess vanished.

The recorder of these marvels comments: Men must put on false, ugly faces to please their superiors—such is the hypocritical way of the world. The foul and hideous are prized the world over. Something of which you feel a little ashamed may win praise; while something of which you feel exceedingly ashamed may win much higher praise. But any man who dares to reveal his true self in public is almost certain to shock the multitude and make them shun him. Where, indeed, can that fool of Lingyang* take his priceless jade to weep? Alas! I shall seek my fortune in castles in the clouds and mirages of the sea.

A DREAM OF WOLVES

Old Mr. Pai of Chihli had an elder son, Chia, who was appointed magistrate of a southern district so far from his home that three years passed without any news of him.

One day a distant relative named Ting, long a stranger to the house, visited Mr. Pai and was given a very warm reception. Since this Ting was a necromancer, in the course of conversation Mr. Pai questioned him about his experiences in the nether regions; and Ting related certain

*A man of Lingyang presented a piece of uncut jade to the King of Chu in the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.); but the king, not recognizing its value, chopped off the donor's feet in anger.

fantastic tales at which the old man smiled incredulously. A few days later, Mr. Pai was sleeping when Ting came in and invited him for a stroll; the old man accompanied him to a city, where Ting pointed out a gate to him.

"This is where your sister's son lives," he said.

"How can that be?" demanded Mr. Pai, for this particular nephew was then a magistrate in Shansi.

"If you don't believe me," retorted Ting, "why not go in and see for yourself?"

Mr. Pai went in and, sure enough, found his nephew in the hat and robes of a high official seated in the hall. But he was surrounded by so many guards and attendants with halberds and banners that the old man could not get anyone to announce him, and presently Ting drew him away.

"Your son's yamen is not far from here," he said. "Would you like to see him?"

Upon Mr. Pai's assenting, they proceeded to another mansion.

"Go in!" said Ting.

But Mr. Pai saw a huge wolf barring the entrance, and dared not advance.

"Go on!" urged Ting.

They passed in through a second gate to a hall which was thronged within and without by wolves, some sitting and some lying, while a great heap of white bones in the courtyard did nothing to reassure the terrified old man. But Ting encouraged him to proceed, shielding him with his own body. Just then Mr. Pai's son, Chia, came out and was delighted to see his father and Ting. Inviting them to be seated, he ordered his attendants to prepare a meal. Then a huge wolf entered carrying a dead man in its jaws.

"What is this?" demanded Mr. Pai, springing fearfully to his feet.

"Just a little refreshment for you, father," replied Chia.

The old man hastily waved the corpse away. His heart was thumping violently, and he would have left immediately if not for the wolves which were blocking the way. But just as he was at a loss what to do, the whole pack scattered howling, some to slink under the couches, others to creep under the tables; and while he was wondering what this could mean, two warriors in gilded mail strode sternly in and bound Chia with a black rope. Chia fell straight to the ground and changed into a tiger with sharp fangs. One of the warriors drew his sword and would have cut off the tiger's head, had not the other interposed:

"Wait a bit! That is for the fourth month next year. We had better just knock out its teeth."

So they produced a great mallet and, with a few blows, scattered the tiger's teeth over the ground. Its roar of pain shook the very hills. Mr. Pai was utterly aghast, when he suddenly awoke and realized that he had been dreaming!

Troubled at heart, the old man sent to invite Ting over; but the necromancer begged to be excused. Then Mr. Pai recorded his dream and sent his second son to Chia with a letter of earnest warning and good advice. On his arrival, the younger brother was taken aback to find that Chia had lost all his front teeth; and, although the magistrate declared that he had broken them by falling from his horse when drunk, the date of this accident was *the very day* of their father's dream. Astounded by this fact, the younger brother handed over the old man's letter; and Chia, when he read it, changed colour. He tried, however, to pass the matter off lightly.

"This is the merest coincidence," he asserted. "Why worry about a dream?"

Engaged as he then was in bribing his superiors to recommend him to a higher post, Chia gave no further thought to the strange dream. His younger brother stayed with him for a few days, but when he saw the corrupt runners with which the yamen was filled, and the bribe-givers who streamed in from morning till night, he begged Chia with tears to mend his ways.

"You come from the country," scoffed the magistrate. "What do you know of official life? Promotion depends upon a man's superiors and not upon the people. If your superiors approve of you, you are a good official; but if you love the people, how can you please those above you?"

Unable to persuade Chia, his younger brother went back to tell his father all that had occurred; and the old man wept bitterly. All he could do, however, was to give away his property to relieve the poor and daily entreat the gods that, in the retribution which must overtake his wicked son, Chia's innocent wife and children should be spared.

The following year news came that Chia had been promoted to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and many people called to congratulate his father; but Mr. Pai wept and took to his bed, declaring himself too unwell to entertain guests. Before long, it was reported that Chia, falling among robbers on his way home, had been killed with a number of his servants. Then only did the old man leave his bed.

"His sins have been visited on his own head," he said. "Heaven has been merciful to our family!"

He proceeded to burn incense and return thanks; and, although friends who came to offer condolences tried to persuade him that the news might be false, he believed it implicitly and started preparing his son's grave.

Chia was not dead, however. In the fourth month, as soon as he quitted his post and left his district, he had fallen in with robbers. And although he gave them all he had, the robbers said: "We are here to avenge the wrongs of the people of the whole district, not just to take your money!" Then they cut off his head.

The robbers next asked which of the retainers was Shih Ta-cheng;

for Shih had been Chia's right-hand man and abetted him in all his evil courses. When the others pointed him out, the robbers killed him too, and after him four corrupt runners whom Chia had been taking to the capital because of their skill in extorting the last cent from the people. Vengeance thus meted out, the robbers divided the booty between them, stowed it in their bags, and galloped away.

Chia's spirit was still lingering by the roadside when an official passed by and inquired who had been killed. His outriders reported that it was Magistrate Pai.

"What!" exclaimed the official. "The son of old Mr. Pai? We must spare the old man such a cruel sight. Put his head on again."

As someone was attaching Chia's head to his neck, however, the official intervened. "He was a crooked magistrate: his head should not be set straight. Let his chin rest on his shoulder." This said, the official left.

By and by Chia revived; and his wife and children, coming to take away his corpse, found him still breathing. They carried him away, and carefully poured water down his throat, which he was able to swallow. Then, too poor to make the journey home, they put up at an inn. About six months later, Mr. Pai heard of this and sent his second son to bring them home. Though Chia had been restored to life he could see his own back, and was more of a monster than a man. Mr. Pai's nephew, however, governed well and that same year became an Imperial Censor. Thus the whole dream came true.

The recorder of these marvels comments: Many officials in this world are tigers, and their subordinates wolves. Even if an official is not a tiger, his subordinates may be wolves; and some officials are worse than tigers. The trouble with men is that they cannot see themselves truly. But Chia, when restored to life, was made to see himself as others saw him. Marvellous, indeed, are the ways of the gods!

THE EXORCIST MARRIES A FOX

There was once a native of Taishan named Shih Ta-pu who enjoyed dabbling in magic. A Taoist priest, struck by his intelligence, accepted him as his disciple and showed him two tomes, the first dealing with the exorcism of fox-spirits, the second with the exorcism of ghosts. The priest made Shih a gift of the second volume.

"Keep this book well," he said, "and it will provide you with food, clothing and a beautiful wife."

Asked his name, the priest disclosed that he was Wang Chih-cheng of Yuanti Temple, from a village north of Kaifeng. He stayed with Shih for several days and taught him all his arts, with the result that the young man became an expert in spells and charms, and his gate was thronged with folk bearing gifts to solicit his help.

One day an old man, who gave his name as Weng, told the exorcist that his daughter's life was in danger from an evil spirit and offered Shih a rich reward if he would go to see her. Hearing that it was a case of life or death, Shih refused to accept payment in advance, but set out at once with the old man. After travelling several miles they reached a mountain village, and presently came to Weng's house, which proved to be a magnificent mansion. Entering, Shih was conducted to where a girl was sleeping behind a gauze curtain; and when her maids hung up the curtain he saw that she was barely fifteen and her features were ravaged as if by a long illness.

As he drew closer to examine her, the girl suddenly opened her eyes.

"Here comes a good physician!" she cried.

The whole family was delighted, for she had remained speechless for several days. Leaving the girl's chamber to inquire into her symptoms, Shih learned from the old man that in broad daylight they had seen a young man going into her bed. At each attempt to catch him, the young man vanished, only to reappear soon after. They therefore suspected that he must be a ghost.

"If he is a ghost," remarked Shih, "I can easily rid you of him. But if he is a fox, I shall be powerless to help."

"A fox!" exclaimed the old man. "No, he can't be a fox!"

Having given Weng a charm, Shih retired for the night; but at midnight a well-dressed youth entered his room, and Shih, taking him to be some relative of his host, rose from his couch to ask the stranger's name.

"I am a ghost," was the reply. "All this family are foxes. I come here because I have taken a fancy to Weng's daughter, Hung-ting. Since this is a case of ghosts versus foxes, and is not immoral by human standards, why should you help Weng's family and separate two lovers? Hung-ting has an elder sister named Chang-ting who is even more beautiful than she is herself; and I have respected her virginity, so that you can have her. In fact, I advise you to help them only if they will let you marry Chang-ting; for then I shall go away of my own accord."

Assured of Shih's consent, the ghost left Hung-ting alone, so that she did not lose consciousness all night; and the next morning her old father joyfully informed the exorcist of the improvement in his daughter's condition and asked him to examine her again. As Shih burned the charm of the previous day then pretended to attend to his patient, he saw behind the embroidered curtain a girl as lovely as an angel, and realized that this must be Chang-ting. After examining the sick girl, he asked for water to sprinkle the curtain; and the elder sister swiftly brought him

a bowl, stealing glances at him as she came and went which drove the ghost entirely from his mind. Then, on the pretext that he must go home to make up certain prescriptions, Shih took his leave of the old man.

The exorcist did not return for several days, during which time the ghost ran completely wild, seducing all the young women and maids in the house with the single exception of Chang-ting. And when the old man sent a servant with a horse to beg Shih to come, the exorcist refused on the pretext of illness. The next day the old man called himself, and Shih hobbled out to greet him with a cane, as if his feet pained him. The old man, greeting him, asked what his trouble was.

"A widower's trouble," answered Shih. "The other night my maid tripped by my bed and spilled a hot-water bottle which scalded my feet."

"Why don't you marry again?"

"If I could find a girl of a good family like yours, I would."

The old man said nothing to this, and presently rose to go.

"I shall call on you again when I am better," said Shih, as he saw Weng off. "You mustn't trouble to come for me yourself."

A few days later, however, the old man was back; and Shih limped out to greet him. After inquiring after the exorcist's health, Weng said:

"I have spoken to my wife, and if you can drive away the ghost that is plaguing us and restore peace to our family, we will gladly give you the hand of our daughter Chang-ting, who is seventeen."

Overcome with joy, Shih made a deep bow.

"Since you are so kind," he said, "I shall do all I can for you in spite of my illness."

He left immediately, galloping with Weng to his house. Fearing, however, after seeing the patient, that they might go back on their word, Shih asked for an assurance from the old man's wife; and presently she came out from the inner chambers.

"These suspicions are unworthy of you, sir!" she protested, and gave him Chang-ting's gold hair-pin as pledge.

Shih bowed in thanks, then summoned the whole household and chanted incantations to exorcise the ghost. Since Chang-ting alone had hidden herself and was nowhere to be found, he wrote a special charm for her and asked one of the household to give it to her. All was quiet that night, and the ghost did not reappear. Hung-ting was still moaning on her bed of sickness; but when he sprinkled holy water over her, she was cured.

Shih now prepared to leave, but the old man pressed him to stay and would take no denial. That evening a sumptuous feast was prepared and they entertained the exorcist as a most honoured guest, his host remaining with him till midnight. Just as Shih lay down to sleep, he heard impatient knocking at the door, and arose to find Chang-ting there. She darted in.

"My family mean to murder you tonight!" she gasped. "You must fly for your life!" This said, she turned and was gone.

White and trembling with fear, Shih jumped over the wall and fled as fast as his legs would carry him towards some distant gleams of light. There, to his great relief, he found villagers who were out hunting; and, having stayed with them till the hunt was over, he returned home in their company. Burning with resentment, he knew no way to avenge himself; for, though he meditated making a trip to Kaifeng to find his master, he could not leave his old father who had long been bed-ridden. So day and night he racked his brains to no purpose—he could not hit on a plan.

One day two sedan-chairs stopped at his door, and he saw that Weng's wife had arrived with Chang-ting!

"Why did you never come back after leaving us that night?" asked the old woman.

At sight of the girl, all Shih's resentment had vanished, so he did not express his former indignation. In obedience to the old woman's instructions, the young couple bowed to each other to complete their wedding ceremony. This done, Shih wished to prepare a feast for his mother-in-law, but she declined.

"I have no time to enjoy a feast with you," she said. "My husband is old and muddle-headed. If he should do anything foolish I hope you will forgive me for Chang-ting's sake." Then she mounted her chair and left.

The fact was that the old woman had not been privy to the plot to kill Shih. Only later that night, when her husband went out to pursue Shih but failed to catch him, did she learn of his wicked scheme. She had been angry and quarrelled with Weng every day since, while Chang-ting spent all her time weeping and refused to eat, until her mother insisted on bringing her to Shih against the old man's wishes. All this the exorcist learned from Chang-ting when he questioned her.

Two or three months later, the old man asked his daughter to come home on a visit; but Shih refused to let her go, for fear that Weng would keep her; so she often wept with longing for her home. After a year she gave birth to a son, whom they named Huei-erh. A wet nurse was engaged for the child, but he cried constantly and every night wanted to sleep with his mother.

A day came when Weng once more sent a sedan-chair with a message that his wife was pining to see her daughter; and at this Chang-ting's distress was so great that Shih felt he must let her go. He would not allow her, however, to take her son with her; so she left alone, promising to be back in a month's time. When she had been away for six months without sending any word home, Shih despatched a messenger to make inquiries; and found that their house had long been empty. After another two years, he gave up hope of her returning; but still the child cried every night for his mother, and Shih felt his own heart would break.

Then his father died, and he himself fell so ill for grief that he was unable to attend to the funeral. As he lay half conscious in bed he heard a woman wailing, and opening his eyes saw that Chang-ting had entered in deep mourning. In agony of spirit he fainted dead away. The maids cried out in alarm, and Chang-ting dried her tears to attend to her husband, until gradually he recovered consciousness. He thought he was already dead, however, and his wife had to convince him that they were meeting on earth and not in the nether regions.

"I was not a good daughter, so I failed to talk my father round," she told him. "I have done you a great wrong by remaining away for three years; but only just now, when my family was passing this way from the east, did I hear of your father's death. In obedience to my father I have severed relations with you; but I cannot obey him when it means showing a lack of respect to my father-in-law. My mother knows that I am here, but not my father."

While she was speaking her son had climbed on her knee, and she shed tears as she caressed the child.

"My submission to my father has lost my son his mother," she lamented. At that the boy cried, and all in the room wept.

Presently, when Chang-ting rose to attend to family affairs and neatly set out the sacrifice before her father-in-law's coffin, Shih felt comforted; but he had been confined to his bed for so long that he could not get up to help, and she had to ask his brother-in-law to entertain the mourners. After the funeral rites, when Shih was able to walk with a stick and had attended the interment, Chang-ting said she should go home to receive the reproaches of her angry father; but her husband's entreaties and her child's tears prevailed on her to remain. Soon after, however, came news that her mother was ill.

"I came for your father's sake," she said to Shih. "Will you not let me go for my mother's?"

Having won her husband's consent, she bade the nurse carry the little boy elsewhere to play, and, bathed in tears, left the house.

Years passed, and Shih and his son began to forget Chang-ting. But one morning, as he opened the door, in she walked! Much astonished, Shih asked the reason for her return; and, seating herself sadly on the couch, she answered with a sigh:

"Brought up in the inner chambers, I used to count a few hundred yards a great distance; but now in one day and one night I have covered hundreds of miles. I am exhausted."

Asked why she had travelled so far, Chang-ting hesitated to answer; and when Shih pressed her to speak, she wept.

"What I am about to tell you, though it distresses me, will probably please you," she began. "Some years ago we moved to Shansi to live in the house of a certain Mr. Chao, with whom we were on excellent terms. Then Hung-ting married one of his sons, who proved to be a rake and

made her very unhappy; and when she told my father, he forbade her to go back to her husband for half a year. That made young Chao so angry that he asked a wicked sorcerer to call up spirits to seize my father and carry him off in chains. The rest of us have scattered in panic in all directions."

Shih could not suppress a smile at this recital, and his wife was angry.

"Even if he treated you unkindly, he is my father," she said reproachfully. "We have been husband and wife for some years, and no quarrel ever marred our love. Today my family is ruined, my father gone, and my dear ones scattered—if you are not sorry for my father, you should at least show some consideration for me! Yet you sit there smiling at my grief, without saying a word to comfort me. How heartless you are!"

She left so abruptly that although Shih hurried after her to apologize, he could not find her. Then he repented bitterly, fearing that he would never see her again. Two or three days later, however, Chang-ting and her mother arrived together; and Shih, overjoyed to see them, offered his condolences. To his amazement, both mother and daughter kowtowed to him; and, asked the reason, wept.

"I left you the other day in a fit of anger," said Chang-ting. "But today I must humble myself to beg a favour of you. Ah, the shame of it!"

"Though my father-in-law proved inhuman," replied Shih, "I have never forgotten your mother's kindness and your love. It is human nature to rejoice at the misfortunes of those one hates. Why couldn't you bear with me?"

"On the road I met my mother," said Chang-ting, "who told me that it was none other than your master who caught my father."

"That simplifies matters," said Shih. "But if the old man does not come back, you will mourn for a father; while if he does come back, your husband and son will be fated to loneliness once more."

The old woman swore that this would not be the case, and Chang-ting also vowed to stay with him ever after to repay his kindness. So Shih packed and set off immediately for Kaifeng.

He found his way to the temple just after the Taoist priest's return, and his master asked what had brought him there. Shih's eye fell on an old fox in the kitchen which had a rope through one foreleg.

"I am here for that monster!" he answered with a laugh.

Questioned by the priest, he explained: "This is my father-in-law." Then he told the whole story.

Because the fox was so crafty, the priest was reluctant to let it go; but finally he acceded to Shih's requests. And as Shih related all the tricks old Weng had played, the fox slipped under the stove as if ashamed.

"At least it still has a sense of shame!" cried the priest, chuckling.

At last Shih rose to go, dragging the fox after him. But when he cut the rope with a knife and started pulling it out from the beast's leg, the fox gnashed its teeth in pain. Shih then stayed his hand to jeer:

"Shall I leave it since it hurts?"

The fox glared savagely at him. The moment it was freed it shook its tail and darted off, and Shih also left the temple.

News of the old fox's release reached Shih's home three days before his return, and Chang-ting's mother left, charging her daughter to wait for her husband's arrival. Upon his return, Chang-ting kowtowed to thank him.

"If you have some feeling for me as your husband, that is all I ask," he said, helping her to rise. "There is no need for gratitude."

"Now my family is moving back to the old house," Chang-ting told him. "It is near by and easy to reach; so I would like to go home for three days. Can you trust me?"

"Our child lost his mother soon after he was born," said Shih, "yet he managed to survive. And I have lived so long as a widower that I am used to it. You might bear in mind that instead of behaving like young Chao, I have repaid cruelty with kindness and have done my best for you. If you fail to come back, you will just be proving your faithlessness; and, though your house is near, I shall not trouble to come to see you. It is not a question of trusting you or otherwise."

The following day, accordingly, Chang-ting went home. But in two days she was back. Shih asked why she had returned so quickly this time.

"Because you taunted my father in Kaifeng," she answered, "he still bears you a grudge. It made me unhappy to hear him complaining incessantly, so I came back early."

Since then, Chang-ting and her mother exchanged many visits; but Shih and his father-in-law would have nothing more to do with each other.

The recorder of these marvels comments: That the fox was a thoroughly crafty animal can be seen from its attempt to spoil both its daughters' marriages. But since Shih obtained Chang-ting's hand in an extremity, the old fox had some excuse for going back on its word. And since Shih loved Chang-ting enough to save her father, he should have laid aside former grievances in order to win the fox by kindness, instead of taunting it with its cruel plight. Can we blame the old fox for never forgiving him? Unfortunately, the world is full of men who remain at variance with each other for similar reasons.

Translated by Gladys Yang and Yang Hsien-yi

Love Songs from Turfan

Wen Chieh

1. Beneath the Apple Tree

Ho, lad beneath the apple tree,
The time for singing's past.
Your lass comes by the watercourse,
Her young heart beating fast.
What pent-up feeling, unexpressed,
Has set it throbbing in her breast?

Last spring when she in orchard worked;
Your lilting songs would flute,
And long before the blossom swelled
You yearned to pluck the fruit.
"What is he after? How his lay
Distracts me! Would he'd go away!"

But all the summer long you stayed,
Your eyes upon her set.
What need for haste? The apples were
Too small for picking yet.
"What can he want?" then thought the maid.
"He dogs me like my very shade."

* Turfan Basin is in the Sinkiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Northwest China.

'Tis autumn now, the boughs hang low,
The apples soon must drop.
The lass lies wide awake at nights. . . .
Can she fret for her crop?
Oh, hurry lad, her peace restore,
And speak the word she's waiting for!

Ho, lad beneath the apple tree,
Your songs are out of place!
Your lass is coming o'er the sward,
A mysterious smile lights up her face.
Speak out, my lad, no more time waste!
The fruits of love are yours to taste!

2. When the Grapes Are Ripe

The grapes now are ripe,
On the vines hanging low.
The girls are still working,
The lads homeward go.

They halt on the roadside
And fiddle like mad;
In vain is their singing—
No grapes to be had.

Disappointed and angry
They feign to depart.
"You niggardly hussies,
Your grapes must be tart!"

The girls with sly glances
Hand out the sour grapes
To the lads: will the fellows
Be huffed at their japes?

The lads suck the sour grapes,
Their hearts fondly beat:
"The grapes of true love
Are than honey more sweet!"

CHOU CHANG-KU: Two Lambs

3. After the Dancing

The dancing is over. The fiddler and drummer
Have still work in hand, though 'tis late in the night.
Young Toerhtihan they are both seeing homeward,
The one on her left, and the one on her right.

The fallen leaves rustle beneath their soft foot-fall.
The young fiddler pours out his heart in a sigh:
"Grapes hang from the trellis, all ready for plucking . . .
Will she whom I proffer my heart to deny?"

The drummer impatiently knocks at the branches
And muses aloud: "You know, Toerhtihan,
There is many a lad, there is many a maiden
Whose fates have been linked at the feast of Corban."

What can she be thinking? Why is she so quiet?
The fiddler and drummer they drop to the rear.
They hotly dispute, they surmise and they wonder,
Then rush back and together pour this in her ear:

"It's not so hard, surely, to make up your mind, lass!
We're both likely lads, and as good as they come.
Just listen a minute, I'll play you my fiddle!
Just listen, hear what I can do with my drum!"

"You're an excellent drummer—no one can deny it;
When you wield the drum-sticks, no foot can resist.
And you, when your fiddle discourses sweet music,
The poor nightingale, quite abashed, must desist."

The fiddler and drummer, perplexed and bewildered,
Grin helpless: she's left them as wise as before.
"But which would you rather—the drum or the fiddle?
You can surely decide which of them you like more!"

"A twelvemonth ago I decided . . . I'm sorry,"
The lassie makes answer, a catch in her voice.
"But young Asierh at Urumchi—you know him,
He works at the power plant—well, he is my choice."

4. The Girl Who Grows Melon

Along the Eastern Lake the gardens spread
That yield the finest melons in Sinkiang.
The name of her who grows them is more sweet
Than all the fruits that from the trellis hang.

Her eyes are blacker than the melon seeds,
Red as their flesh their cheeks, and twice as gay.
And as she works, her two long glistening plaits
Seem like the tendrils on the vines that sway.

The young men pester her: "We fain would eat
Those juicy melons, produce of your toil."
The seeds they carry homeward in their hands,
And sow them in their hearts: 'tis fertile soil.

These amorous youths who come to visit her,
That lovely melon-maid beyond compare,
With oaths of burning, everlasting love
Compete in song: their voices fill the air.

Oh, songs well easy from the heart on fire;
Their songs re-echo round Tien Shan so high.
"Give answer, Tsaoerhan!" Abashed they stand,
As she with equal fervour makes reply:—

"If songs were everything I might agree.
I'm not ungrateful, but I must be blunt.
Not one of you will stand the slightest chance
Who is not a hero on the labour front!"

Translated by Yuan Ko-chia

STORIES FOR CHILDREN

YEN WEN-CHING

The author of these stories for children was born in Wuchang on the middle Yangtse in 1915. He started his writing career while working in Peking Library from 1935 onwards. In 1938 he went to Yenan where his novel A Man's Troubles *and a collection of children's stories* Nan-nan and Uncle Whiskers *were published. In 1945, he became the editor of the leading newspaper in Northeast China, the* Northeast Daily. *Since liberation, he has also written a number of stories for children.*

Two of the stories for children printed here, namely, "As the Wind Blows" and "Songs of the Red-beaked Crow," were written before the liberation.

At present, Yen Wen-ching is editor of the monthly magazine People's Literature.

THE THREE CONCEITED KITTENS

Once upon a time there lived a Mother Pusscat and her three children. Number one was a girl called Spot; number two was a boy called Brownie; number three was another boy called Blackie. And as all mothers love their children, Mother Pusscat loved hers, very much. She looked after them in every way, brought them up carefully, and sent them to school when they reached the right age. All three of them were in the same class.

They studied happily for a cat-term, grew fat and strong, and went home merrily to their mother in the summer holidays.

Of course Mother Pusscat wanted to know what her children had learnt at school. One morning, talking after breakfast, she asked them: "Now, my children, have you been good kittens and done well at school?"

The three kittens' tummies were bulging with breakfast, and they felt full and happy. They half-closed their eyes, and with one accord answered proudly: "Oh *yes*, mum, we were wonderful!"

Brownie, who always tried to get in first, added immediately, "We've read heaps and heaps of books." Spot said, "We sang, and painted." Blackie followed, "And we did physical exercises too. Oh, we had almost everything in our school." Brownie chirruped up again: "We'll know absolutely *everything* in the world, if we keep on studying like this." Then Spot: "Goodness, yes. We'll be so wise." "Wise as wise can be," agreed Blackie proudly.

Mother Pusscat was pleased to hear this, of course, but she did wonder a little if they were being quite truthful, so, to test them out, she said, "What are you going to do then, when you grow up, with so much knowledge?"

"Prr'p! I haven't thought about that!" said Spot. "As long as I'm somebody important, anything will do for me," said Blackie. Brownie actually thought for a minute, and then said, "Knowledge is everything. People will honour us just for mastering it; we needn't *do* anything. I'm going to read lots and lots of books. I shall just go on going to school when I'm grown up."

Now Mother Pusscat thought most highly of the joy of labour, yet none of her children had spoken of that! She therefore asked another question, "Haven't your teachers told you anything about labour?"

Labour? Well, yes, the teacher had talked about it. But to tell the truth, not one of them had paid much attention. But the three conceited kittens were not a bit taken aback, and answered their mother readily.

It was again Brownie who spoke first: "Oh yes, mama. I know how the character's made, and I can read it. L-a-b-o-u-r." "Miaw, then!" sneered Blackie, "*I* can write it myself." "So can I!" exclaimed Spot.

Mother Pusscat still had a feeling that there was something wrong with her boastful youngsters. She was very much afraid that they had no idea what the word really meant. To make sure, because she was worried, she asked again:

"Yes, my dears, but can't one of you tell me what's good about labour? It's no good just being able to read it, or even to write it."

This time Brownie didn't open his mouth. Spot put her head on one side and mused. "Teacher spoke too fast, I couldn't keep up with him," said she.

"Well, there's nothing particularly hard to understand,"—Blackie tried in vain to explain—"It's something like doing physical exercises, isn't it? Or maybe not quite. . . ."

So poor Mother Pusscat realized that her children hadn't really studied very well at school. She was afraid that they'd just got their heads muddled up. She would have to think of a way herself that would make them go over their lessons during the holidays, and generally more clever. First, she felt, she must start with labour.

"Children, you all love to eat fish, don't you?"

"Why, of course!" Brownie thought it rather funny that his mother

should even ask such a question. "I could eat three *huangyu* (which are small salt-water fish) at one go."

"I wouldn't eat that much," said Spot, "it would put me off my food. Two at a meal is enough for me."

But young Blackie shouted, "Oh, you must be different. I can eat five if I get the chance."

"My poor misguided children, being able to eat fish is nothing to boast about. It's catching fish that is worth doing. Now I think *you* should try to catch some today. *You* should do a bit of labour. If you catch any, we'll have fish for supper. Besides, I want to see if you *can*, any of you, do anything."

Brownie didn't want to understand what his mother was trying to do, and was silly enough to say, "Oh, catching fish is quite easy!"

"I don't think it will be too difficult," said Spot. "But we're so young, only kittens still. Why *should* we have to catch our own fish?"

Blackie wasn't going to admit that he was too young to do anything. "Pooh," he said. "We're not too young, so there. All right, we'll go to work, and catch fish."

This was the silly way the three conceited kittens agreed to do some labour. They set out immediately, determined to show how very clever they were. But they only thought they were clever; they didn't really use their brains at all. They wouldn't even ask for any advice, and in fact set off with just their bare paws, taking absolutely nothing to catch fish with!

And where should they look for fish? They saw not even a shadow of a fish, though they seemed to walk and walk for a long time. So they sat down to lay their heads together. Brownie vaguely remembered something he had read in a book, about fishes living in rivers, or maybe it was lakes or seas. How, then, were they going to find a river, or a lake or a sea? They had never been far from

home before, nor had they ever seen a river, much less a lake or a sea. But they couldn't see any way out of it. They would just have to find one of them.

So they looked and looked as they trotted along, until they became really tired and hungry. At last they came to a little shallow stream on a hillside. "Hurrah," shouted Brownie in delight. "A river! We've found a river!" "Clever, aren't you," agreed Spot. "It must be a river, it's not a lake or a sea. But why can't we see any fish in it?"

Blackie stared for a while and then he hit on something. "Good thing there aren't any fish in it, if you ask me, stupids. If there were any, how should we catch them?"

The three silly little kittens, standing there beside the narrow stream, were stunned. They couldn't think what to do next.

They were in a beautiful place. Clear water rippled in the stream. Nearby was a meadow dotted with flowers of all colours, and a bit further off was a wood, with its branches waving like hands. A gentle breeze was blowing, bringing with it the smell of the wild flowers. But the three poor kittens weren't at all in the mood to enjoy the wonders of nature.

"Let's sit down here, and wait. There *must* be fish in this river," said Spot.

"Yes, and when the fish come, we'll jump into the water and catch them," said Blackie.

"Well," said Brownie, "let's sit down and wait a while anyway."

They were so tired that, fish or no fish, they simply had to sit down and have a rest. They gazed and gazed at the glittering stream, which dazzled their eyes, but they never saw any sign of a fish. After a long while the three conceited kittens, feeling even more tired and hungry, began to pity themselves terribly.

Brownie, with his eyes closed, mewed in a tragic way, "How dreadful for us, to have to leave our mother and go out to catch fish while we are still so young!"

Blackie said, "I don't see much sense in this labour."

Spot said, "I feel like crying if I don't see a fish soon. But I don't want to be a cry-baby."

Now it so happened that a very old rat lived in the wood across the stream. As a matter of fact, he moved out there from the city because he was afraid of Mother Pusscat. Just at this moment he was lazily snoozing under a tree, until the kittens' chatter woke him up. First of all he got a terrible fright when he heard cats' voices, and ran round behind the tree to listen to what they were saying. But very soon he recognized them for what they were—nothing but very ignorant little kittens! He stopped being frightened, and began to work out a way of tricking them. In fact, what he meant to do was to stop Mother Pusscat's plan working. After all, it would be bad for the whole rat race if kittens grew

up clever and able. He was full of wicked ideas, so he thought them over, and chose one out.

The hungry kittens found that their thoughts were all about meals at home. Blackie now said that he could eat six fish at once. "Go on," said Brownie, "six is nothing. I could eat seven now. But where are the fish, and when will they come?"

"It's lovely to eat fish, but catching them is horrid," sighed Blackie. "It's even worse than doing arithmetic."

"I'd rather get low marks in an exam any day than catch fish," said Spot sadly. "We shouldn't have left our mother. Why should kittens learn to labour, anyhow? Besides, I don't see that we're ignorant, just because we don't know how to work."

"That's right." They heard a rather squeaky voice from across the stream. They looked over, and saw a grey creature sitting under a tree, nodding to them. To tell you the truth, they'd never seen a rat, so they were quite friendly, and asked, "Who are you?"

"I'm a learned person myself, and I enjoyed your talk very much. I wonder where such clever people come from. I'm sure you must all be very diligent students."

The three silly little kittens were very gratified to hear this and asked him to come over to their side of the stream. But the rat hastily shook his head. "No, no, I'm an old man and hate moving. You're tired, too, I can see. There's no need for you to move either. We can go on talking like this. What you've been saying is very true. Take me, for example. As a learned person, I don't have to work. People who don't work can't be said to be foolish. On the contrary, they are really extremely wise people."

"Our mum says we should enjoy labour," said Spot.

The rat fingered his whiskers, and then said, "*You* should labour? Tut, tut. That's nonsense. In the first place, my children, if you have to work, it means using your hands, doesn't it? And doesn't that make you very tired?"

"Well, I don't feel tired when I do physical training," said Blackie, "but today I'm tired already, directly I start working."

"You can see how right I am!" said the rat with a nasty chuckle. He was so pleased with himself that he nearly moved across the stream, but he checked himself in time. "You're really clever; I knew it. All right then. In the second place, labour will make you all dirty. Look, if you jumped into that wet sand, wouldn't it make you in a dreadful mess?"

"Yes, indeed, and I do hate mess," grumbled Spot. "Today the wind and dust have made my nice green ribbon all dirty."

"What a shame!" said the rat. "And you such a pretty little kitten!"

But Blackie didn't agree, this time. "Look," he said, "I don't mind getting all sandy when I'm practising the long jump."

"Possibly not," said the rat slyly. "But what if it comes to catching fish in sand?"

"I won't do *that*!" answered Blackie.

The rat nodded. "There you are then. Catching fish in sand is dirty work. Labour is not good."

"But our book doesn't say that fish are to be found in sand!" said Brownie, rather surprised.

The rat peeped sideways at him. "Aren't you clever! Maybe *your* book didn't say so. But the book *I've* read says that fish may be found in sand. We need not argue about this, however, if we've settled that it's not good to work. In the third place then, hard work brings disgrace. Fancy kittens who have to catch fish for themselves! And the fish won't even oblige by coming to look for the kittens. What a shameful thing! You don't want to lose face like that, do you?"

"Of course not," said Spot.

The rat talked faster and faster as he got more and more pleased with himself. "And in the fourth place, my children, there's no freedom if you have to labour. Now you would be free, wouldn't you, if you stayed at home, and just lay down on such a hot day as this. But you're not free at all if you've to come out to work and the fish you want to catch won't even come to you. And then fifthly, which is the last conclusion I want to draw, only fools work. Clever children don't have to. Why should they have to catch fish? If you're clever you can eat without working, not like stupid people, who have to *catch* the fish they eat. Isn't it just like the brilliant scholars who get top marks without even doing the arithmetic exercises, compared with those who fail to get top marks even though they've done all the exercises in the book? Tell me, am I right or wrong?"

"Right, right," chorused the three young kittens. They were so happy at hearing the rat's conclusions that they purred to him, "Oh, you are so clever. You are so good. Won't you tell us your name?"

The rat was also so happy at being so successful with his trick that he began to answer without thinking what it would sound like. "I'm Mister R. . . ." But he just managed to stop before all the word came out. "I'm, well, who am I? I'm clever Mister Whiskers, and a learned old gentleman. Clever children's manners ought to be better. Don't you know that you shouldn't ask personal questions?"

"Let's go home," said Blackie.

"But the fish! How can we get the fish! I don't think we ought to forget what mum told us to do, she loves us so," said Spot.

Brownie asked the rat, "Old Mister Learned, do you think we shall ever catch fish in this river? We've been waiting such a long time."

The rat pretended to be angry, and demanded, "How can you ask such a stupid question? I was thinking you were so clever. First, I've

told you there's no need to catch fish at all. Secondly, I've seen plenty of fish in my life, but I've never heard that you have to catch them in rivers."

"Where are they, then?" asked Blackie.

The rat was really in a rage by now. "Why, in cupboards, and baskets. It doesn't matter if the baskets are high or low on the wall, you can get the fish quite easily. Fish can also be found in refrigerators —though I admit that those are difficult to get into because they're made of metal. All the same. . . ."

Whatever's all this about, wondered the three young kittens. Suddenly Spot thought she smelt a queer smell, and thought it came from the rat. She whispered to Blackie, "I can smell something queer." Blackie agreed. "I think I can too. What is it?"

The rat saw that they were now full of doubts, and checked himself quickly. "Since you don't seem to like my talk, I'd better take leave of you. I'm tired, very tired, and want to rest. Goodbye." He nodded hurriedly and slipped off into the woods.

So the three kittens had to go home without a single fish, but with three very empty tummies.

Mother Pusscat had dinner all ready for them. She was sure before she saw them that they wouldn't have found any fish. As they ate their dinner, they told her all about their adventures.

Mother Pusscat laughed as she said, "My dear conceited children, you thought you were already great, and you despised labour. I'm ashamed of you, and your learned whiskered gentleman. You've been talking to a nasty rat. You didn't catch any fish, but you made friends with a rat and listened to his advice! Oh, whatever kind of silly kittens are you?"

The three kittens blushed right up to their ears. But of course you couldn't see it, because kittens have so much fur on their faces. They knew they were wrong now. They knew now that there was a lot of knowledge in the world besides what you learnt from books. They asked their mother to take them and show them how to catch fish properly another day.

Since then they have learnt ever so many things besides fishing. They have become diligent, hard-working, and *really* clever kittens.

THE BEE AND THE EARTHWORM

Once upon a time the bee and the earthworm were not only on very good terms, but even looked alike.

In those days the earthworm was not afraid of the daylight, and did not live in the earth and keep silent all day long, but sang. Then it was fat, with a large head, and even had legs, though admittedly short ones. No one nowadays would recognize it as an earthworm.

The bee was also quite different. It could not secrete honey nor make honeycomb, nor could it fly, for it had no wings. Its body was shorter than the earthworm's. It had six short legs, but they were not so neat and nimble as they are today. No one nowadays would recognize it as a bee.

In the days when the earthworm had legs and the bee had no wings there grew lots of delicious things on earth, such as strawberries and grapes, and other delicious red and purple berries which we don't know the names of. And there was lovely fresh, sweet grass, and beautiful flowers. The bee and the earthworm could easily eat their fill without the slightest exertion.

When they had had enough, they played together—there was nothing to separate them. Who nowadays has ever seen a bee playing with an earthworm? Now one flies in the air, and the other wriggles in the ground. They never cross one another's path. Neither do they look at all alike. In fact, they've changed tremendously since those days. How has this come about? Let us start the story from the beginning.

In those old, old days, there were many lovely things to eat, but gradually these became less and less, since everybody ate, but nobody took the trouble to plant anything. So finding things to eat became more and more difficult.

Eventually days of scarcity followed the old days of plenty. Hunger was all the bee and the earthworm tasted, until they could barely ever find even a mouthful.

The bee worried, yet the earthworm seemed not to care a scrap, but hummed and sang all day long. "Now, don't keep on that incessant singing, my friend."—The bee could bear it no longer—"We must think of some way to make something to eat. All right?"

The earthworm was feeling perfectly happy, and replied testily, "Make! Make! What can *you* make? You do think yourself clever, don't you? Everything to eat comes ready made. How can you *make* it?"

The bee was reduced to silence by its friend's sarcastic remark. But this was the first time the two friends had ever had a difference of opinion.

But the bee loved using its brain. It was not content simply to think of some way to make anything to eat. It wanted to make something which was particularly sweet and tasty. But how? The bee racked its brains all the time.

One day it happened that it rained heavily. The two friends took shelter under a rock. The rain poured down and down, till the water rose and came up all over their feet. The bee was shivering with cold, what with the piercing wind and the pelting rain, so it said to the earthworm:

"If only we could live in the hole of a tree! That must be lovely and warm and cosy."

The earthworm was dozing away. It shook its head and said: "Don't talk nonsense. You are always thinking up impossibilities."

But the bee was pleased with its idea and said again, "Now, if we could build ourselves a. . . . I don't know! Anyway, *something* to live in, it would be even better than a dry hole in a tree."

For in those days the bee was not able to make a comb, so it did not know what to call it.

But this remark made the earthworm angry. "Goodness, why are you so stupid? We've been sleeping under leaves and stones, and so have our ancestors, ever since they first existed. And now you want to build something to live in! What makes you so sure you *can* build anything? Stop talking rot and let me sleep in peace for a while."

This made the bee a bit annoyed, too, so it kept silent, but decided that it could and would make something to live in, and show the earthworm that it was possible.

The sky cleared. The bee tried to make a kind of cell with mud. It used all its legs to mix it up, pressed it into little flat cakes and then tried to make the separate cakes into one large one. It made several attempts, but they all failed. It tried again and at last succeeded in getting them to stick together. Then it tried to roll it up into a tube. It tried once, twice, thrice, but it just couldn't manage it. Finally the bee, sweating all over, became so tired that it called out to the earthworm for help. "Give me a hand, my dear friend, will you, please?"

But the earthworm never stirred a foot, but only sniffed.

The mud began to dry up under the sun and could not be rolled any more. And the bee was tired out, so it stopped its labours and took a rest.

Then with a sneering air the earthworm said to the bee, "Well, my friend, don't waste your sweat any more. I told you it was no use."

The bee did not answer. It was racking its brains trying to work out how it could build a good house.

A few days later, when they were out looking for something to eat they came across a whitethorn, laden with small white flowers. It called out to them: "Hallo there, friends, can you come and assist me, please? I can bloom, but I can't bring forth fruit. I'll manage it if you'll help me shift the pollen. And I'll reward you nicely."

The earthworm glanced sideways at it and answered gruffly, "It's none of my business!"

But the bee said, "I'll have a try, if you like."

The whitethorn was most grateful, "Oh yes, indeed, please try."

"You're really meddlesome," said the earthworm to the bee. "Go ahead and try if you're not afraid of trouble, but *I'll* have nothing to do with it." And it actually went off without a moment's hesitation and even hummed in a superior way as it went along.

The bee began to climb the tree with great difficulty. Its legs were short and clumsy, so it took a very long time to climb up the trunk.

And then, just when it was getting near a flower it fell right off because its body was so clumsy. Thanks to some thick grass growing underneath it was not hurt, but got up slowly, rested a minute and started climbing again.

While the bee was labouring away, the earthworm had found a big bush of berries. Chewing a sweet berry, the earthworm thought of the bee and smiled in a very self-satisfied manner.

"There you are. I can lie down and eat to my heart's content, and don't have to exert myself at all. I wonder what my stupid friend bee is doing now. Maybe it's either wounded from falling off the tree, or else starving."

When it had its fill, it lay down beside the bush and slept.

Now all this time, the bee had been patiently trying to climb the tree. Once, twice, thrice. As the bee put out all its efforts, the hair on its back moved and shook, and the more it climbed, the more it kept on shaking. Gradually, strange as it might seem, some of the hairs grew bigger and flatter and changed into four small wings, flapping in time with the bee's movements, and making its body lighter and steadier.

You can see why this was. If you stood on a high narrow door-sill, you would easily lose your balance. But without anyone telling you, you would instinctively raise your arms to balance your body and stand firmly again. The four small wings on the bee's back functioned rather like human arms, so with their help the bee found it could climb the tree quite steadily.

The four small wings on its back grew bigger and bigger—in fact, to their present size. And the bee began to fly. It flew from one flower to the other, carrying the pollen. Its legs became very much more nimble through the steady work they were doing.

The whitethorn was highly grateful to the bee for helping, so it gave the bee all the spare pollen and nectar, and told it how the nectar could be made into something delicious which was called honey.

So off the bee flew with the pollen and nectar. But how was it going to make it into honey? A tough job, no doubt about it! But the bee was patient and used its brain. When one way failed, it thought of another and tried again and again, until success came.

All this time the earthworm stayed in the same place, sleeping and eating in turn. It was too lazy even to sing, much less give a thought to its old friend.

Besides making honey the bee found out how to make wax, and the long-planned honeycomb nest. It built the nest in a hole in a tree, safe from rain and gusts. It lived in a cosy cell, got up early every morning, and worked busily till night.

The bee became more and more clever, competent and beautiful every day, until it had glittering, big eyes, delicate antennae and gauzy wings. Exactly what we see now, in fact.

One day the bee thought of the earthworm. It wanted the earthworm to taste the honey and learn its skill, so that the earthworm could also work.

The bee left its nest and flew all over the place to look for the earthworm, calling for its old friend as it went. But where was it? The bee could not find it anywhere, even after looking for ages.

The fact was that during this long period, the earthworm had also gone through a great change. Its short legs became shorter every day, for lack of exercise. One day, after an extra long sleep, it woke up to find its legs had disappeared entirely. And it became dumb from being too lazy to speak or sing. Since it slept nearly all the time and did not use its brain at all, its head dwindled. But its greedy mouth became stronger, able to eat earth now, through so much chewing. Since it was too lazy to move it had to eat anything it could reach when the good things were gone and in the end there was nothing for it but to eat earth. So it became long and thin. In a word, it became unrecognizable. No wonder the bee didn't see it, though as a matter of fact it flew over it several times.

Of course the earthworm could not recognize the bee either. It wondered who it was calling its name. Then, one day, it heard the young whitethorns calling out. "Welcome, welcome to our good friend, the busy bee." The earthworm was thus made aware that this flying creature was its old friend. It felt ashamed and rueful, and immediately crept into a hole and cried.

The young whitethorns outside the hole tried to console it. "Don't cry. If you work too, and don't idle hereafter, everybody will welcome you as well."

The earthworm did not speak but meditated.

"That's right. I'll work and turn up earth to help the crops to grow better."

The earthworm thus decided to shake off its idleness and laziness once and for all. Even though mute, it could at least use its mouth to eat earth, to help turn it up and increase the fertility of the soil. And now everybody praises it for its diligence. But it is still too embarrassed to come out during daytime to show itself before its old friend the bee.

Translated by Yu Fan-chin
Illustrations by Chu Ta-nien

AS THE WIND BLOWS

Many, many years ago, there lived a poor little boy, all by himself. His father and mother were both dead—they had died while he was still almost a baby—and he lived alone in a little hut in a wild and lonely place. For months on end no human soul came to talk to him, or play with him. Only one friend was ever kind to him . . . a strange friend, the Wind. The Wind was very fond of him and whenever she passed by his hut she would drop in, and have a chat, or play a while with him. It was the Wind who always brought him food. That was the only way this poor child could sustain life in such a desolate place.

One spring day the little boy fell ill. He waited in his lonely hut for ten days before the Wind came to see him. She was sorry to find him ill, and sat down by his bed-side to keep him company. As she talked, she caressed his hair fondly. The Wind loved travel, of course. She had just returned from a long journey, and she told the ailing child all about the curious things she had seen, and said she could tell that spring had come.

"Oh, has it?" asked the little boy eagerly. "How lovely. I remember once, when spring came before, that I liked being out then. I do want to go out now. It's so dark here, all by myself, and I don't have any fun."

"Of course you want to go out," said the Wind, gently. "But you aren't well. You can't run out and play now."

The little boy shook his head sadly. "No, I can't walk, even. My legs don't hold me up, or else I would have gone out long ago." He sighed, then asked the Wind, "Are the flowers blossoming yet?"

"Yes, they are all in bloom. I can see them as I go. I have heard the birds singing, too."

The poor little invalid said, faintly, "Oh, I do long to hear the birds singing. What I like to do is to lie on the new green grass and listen to them, particularly the golden oriole. It's horrid, not being able to go out. . . ." His voice began to tremble, because he was nearly in tears. The Wind comforted him, and said, "My dear child, don't get upset. Just wait a minute, and I'll see what I can do. You'll see, I'll bring spring right into your room for you!"

The Wind swirled out with a rustle. In a few minutes back she came, bringing with her all the things the sick child was longing for. The scent of the spring flowers, the sweet smell of growing grass, and the voices of the birds.

"Oh, lovely," said the little invalid. "Spring is really here." He happily fell asleep, and the Wind tiptoed out of the little hut, without making the smallest murmuring breeze.

It came to be full summer time, but the little boy was still ill. His friend the Wind came in to see him.

"It must be wonderful, outside," he said wistfully to her.

"Yes, it is," said the Wind. "The summer is here."

"How can you tell that it's summer?" he asked.

"I've shaken ripe fruit off the trees, so I know that it must be summer time."

When she said that the fruit was ripe, the little boy said, "I *should* like some fruit. Oh, if only I had a fresh peach to eat, I'm sure I should get well again."

"Very well," said the Wind. "Be patient, and I'll bring you a lovely one."

"Dear Wind, get me one quickly. I'm dying for one!" Away the Wind flew. She flew to an orchard, but there was a watchman there. No sooner did she shake a peach off a tree than it was picked up by the watchman. She couldn't take the peach out of his hands, so she blew away to look elsewhere.

There was a man on guard at the next orchard, too, and the Wind could get no fruit there either. She flew from orchard to orchard, but everywhere the watchmen were too sharp for her. She failed to get any fruit at all.

Now she began to worry. She felt she had been away a long time, and that the little boy would get worse, worrying. In the end she begged a wild apricot tree to let her have just one little apricot. She was nearly back at the hut by then. The apricot tree grew quite close.

When she came back, she found the little boy was worse, and could hardly speak. She caressed him gently, and he half woke up. He looked wearily at the little wild apricot, but shook his head and closed his eyes again. He was too ill, really, to eat anything at all.

The poor Wind! She was so unhappy. She felt that he would have been better if she could have brought him a fresh peach at once. But now she was too late. Her heart ached for the poor child, and when she rustled gently away, she could not help crying bitter tears.

It was autumn. The little boy was no better—in fact he was weaker than ever. The Wind came to see him again.

"Oh Wind, dear friend," he sighed. "I've been in bed so long. Oh, how I want to go out for a little while."

"I'm sure you do," said the Wind, sympathetically, "but you are not strong enough. How can you go out?"

Tears rolled out of the little boy's eyes. Indeed, he was so weak that he couldn't sit up. How could he possibly go out?

"Don't cry," whispered the Wind. "We'll have something for you right here, in front of your bed. Look, I'll show you a whirling dance." And she swirled and blew round and round his bed.

"Let's all join in!" said the scarlet leaves just outside the door.

They jumped into the room and danced with the Wind. The Wind sang a stirring, exciting song as she twirled around. The little boy couldn't help clapping his hands in time with the dance. Finally his head drooped and he fell asleep happily. The Wind drifted away without a sound.

Winter came, but the child was worse than ever, as the Wind found when she came to see him one day. His stove was bare of charcoal, and he had no cotton-padded clothes or quilt. He was shivering with cold when the Wind came, and had no voice left. He could only whisper, faintly, "I am *so* cold."

The Wind could see how he felt, and said, "Try and hold on. I'll go and get something to make you warmer. I'll be back as soon as possible."

She rushed off, and went first to a rich family's house. There she knew she would find a huge stove. There were several fat men sitting around, sweating in the intense heat. The Wind said, most politely, "Gentlemen, could I beg the favour of a little charcoal for a sick little boy who is near freezing to death?"

One of the great louts jumped up peevishly and shouted, "What's this? A little sick boy? We don't know him, nor care. It's nothing to do with us whether he lives or dies."

They chased the Wind out, and closed the window tight against her. The Wind went to several other rich households, but everywhere met with the same unkind refusal.

And then, when she was turned out yet again from a great house, she met a little girl who worked in the household as a maid, who said, "Good lady, I heard what you said to the master. I don't know your little friend, either, but I don't think he should be left to die of cold. I would like to do what I can to help."

She hadn't anything much herself, and had to rack her brains for a moment. Then she pulled out some cotton-padding from her own torn jacket . . . it was all she had in the world that she could give, and said to the Wind, "See if this cotton will help to keep him warm, and tell him I hope he'll get well soon."

"Thank you, my child," said the Wind gratefully, caressing the girl's hair. "You are a very kind little girl."

Clasping the cotton-padding, the Wind flew back, as fast as she could go, to the lonely hut. But she was too late. Her little friend was sleeping his eternal sleep. No more would he awaken to the hardships and loneliness of life again. The Wind sprinkled the cotton-padding over him, kissed and caressed him for the last time, and wept bitterly.

Then she could bear it no longer. She swirled up in a rage, and howled angrily, "You selfish people have no compassion in your heart. I'll sweep away your world! I'll cause you to suffer cold as you allowed the little boy to suffer!"

In a fury, she tore out of the room, spreading bitter cold air in all directions.

This is the story of how the wind comes to be so different in the four seasons of the year. It changes for the sake of the little lonely boy. In the spring, we enjoy the balmy sweet breeze, which first came to make the little boy happy, and bring him the scent of the flowers and the songs of the birds. Summer wind always brings rain . . . the Wind's tears as she laments over the sadness of the little boy who was too ill to eat the wild apricot. In the autumn we see the wild dance of the leaves with the Wind, singing shrilly as they fly. And the furious gales in winter bring the child's bitterness and cold to all selfish people, as the Wind swore it would. We still see the kind little maid's only gift, as flakes of cotton-padding blow down from the wind's grasp. The reason why you cannot use them to make a cotton-padded jacket is because the Wind will not let anyone else use it, as her little friend could not. When we catch it, it changes into water; we call it snow.

SONGS OF THE RED-BEAKED CROW

One fine day, a red-beaked crow came fluttering after the lion, king of the beasts. Wherever the lion went, the crow followed. At first, the lion was annoyed and shouted menacingly at the crow. But the latter took no offence and continued to follow the lion. The lion was used to imposing his will on all the animals, but against this winged, patient creature he could not prevail. Threats were no use, so all the lion could do was to leave matters as they were. In the course of time, the lion came to like the crow; he no longer shouted at the bird and sometimes even let the crow sit on his back and rid him of ticks.

To reward the lion for such kindness, the crow composed many a paean singing the praises of fierceness, strength and war. The crow did not sing badly, either. Every time the lion lay down to rest, the crow would pour out its best songs. But the lion was so ignorant and stupid that he found no pleasure in song, so whenever he heard the crow sing, he just stretched his limbs, yawned and fell asleep in a trice.

An unexpected result of the crow's singing was that it reached many peaceful animals in their hide-outs far away and moved everyone of them almost to tears. They had, one and all, so much suffering and grief to give vent to! The words of the crow's songs could not be clearly made out from afar, but the voice sounded full of real feeling. Listening to this seemingly touching voice, the animals made up words for the songs and fancied that the crow sang them. That was why they were so moved.

Most affected of all was a little fawn. This young creature admired the crow greatly and was very anxious to meet the singer of such wonderful songs. But being afraid of the lion, the fawn did not dare go nearer. He was very unhappy, though, and his desire to meet the crow grew stronger day by day.

But one day the fawn's wish came true. Not because he had plucked up enough courage to face the lion, but simply because he was caught by the latter and so was at last able to meet the crow. Since the lion had just devoured a whole goat, his stomach was pleasantly full and he did not feel like gobbling up the fawn, which had been hurt in the hind legs and could not escape him anyway. So the lion threw his unfortunate victim down by his side and went to sleep.

The red-beaked crow, perched on a walnut tree close by, thereupon began to sing very softly. When the little fawn heard the song, he forgot all about his own pain and lifted his head towards the crow saying: "Oh, is it you, Master Crow? How beautifully you sing!"

The crow cast a careless glance over the fawn and answered, with head cocked proudly: "Ha, that's nothing! If I really put myself into it, I can do much better."

"I've been listening secretly to your singing many times, I have the greatest respect for you!"

The crow, with a show of surprise, eyed the fawn before replying:

"Oh, I didn't know that you too listened secretly to my songs! I only know that many other animals do."

"Yes, many of us like songs."

The crow only chuckled a contented "h'm, h'm!" while the fawn said with a sigh:

"Oh dear, what a pity I shall die so soon! I shan't be able to hear you sing any more. . . ."

"Yes, it *is* a shame, but there are many other animals left to hear me."

The little fawn then inquired with a sad smile: "Master Crow of the Red Beak, I almost forgot to ask you one thing. What are the words to your songs? Unfortunately, I usually hear you sing from a distance, so I don't hear very clearly. . . ."

"Are your ears really so useless? How stupid you are! Well, to tell you very simply—all I sing about are good things. For instance, virtue—the virtuousness of the lion; or bravery—the lion's bravery; and many, many other things, why, I can just go on and on! In short, a red-beaked crow doesn't sing of bad things."

"But isn't there something else? I seem to remember you sang of other things too. What was it that you sang that moved us all to tears?"

Hearing such compliments, the crow could hardly keep from breaking into song again, but managed to explain patiently:

"Oh, probably those were songs about the virtues of the animals, and also songs about the great, lofty emotions of the most honoured ones among them, about the lion's amusements, the lion going hunting—about all sorts of profound and solemn matters, and also stories about how whole flocks of animals sacrifice themselves, so that the lion shall have something

to eat. There are so many stories, I couldn't possibly tell them all. Anyway, these songs are all about good things, too. A red-beaked crow never sings of anything bad."

But the fawn still shook his head: "No, I'm sure these were not the things I heard."

At this, the crow became very angry and shouted: "If it wasn't those songs, then what were they?"

The fawn was frightened, but still he said in a low voice: "I told you I don't know what they were, but I feel that the songs you've mentioned don't mean much to me. And yet, I used to be deeply moved when I heard you sing before. . . ."

The crow really paid no attention to what the fawn was saying, but he did hear something about being deeply moved, so he calmed down a bit and managed to make a more conciliatory sound. But suddenly the fawn had another thought. Gathering up his nerve, he ventured timidly:

"Master Crow of the Red Beak, I don't quite understand why you always want to be with the lion. Will you tell me the reason?"

"What's so difficult to understand about that? But I will tell you: The lion is my friend, and whenever he feasts on an animal, he lets me have all the entrails. Do you understand now? For instance, your entrails, too, you silly little fool, will soon line my stomach. Hahaha!"

The fawn was very much upset by such talk, and could not help exclaiming: "If I don't die, I don't think I shall ever like listening to your songs again!"

"Not die? How could that be? My stomach isn't full yet, in case you don't know. . . ."

"You are wicked! If the other animals find out what you are, they won't like your songs either."

"And why not?"

"We don't like the lion, and we dislike the things that you think good, too. Besides, you sing merely so that you can feed on our entrails. How terrible!"

Here the crow lost his temper again and loudly demanded to know: "Tell me—is my singing voice good or bad?"

"Of course it's good."

"Then that's that. The worth of a singer lies in that only. You are a coward, you're afraid of the lion and selfish enough not to want your carcass to become food for the lion and your entrails food for me; but you still like to hear me sing, because you admire my voice, and you don't really think that soon I shall feast on your entrails! So what does it matter if I do?"

Just then, the lion made a sound. Immediately the crow stopped talking and started to sing. The fawn heaved a deep sigh and let his head drop.

Translated by Chang Su-chu
Illustrations by Chu Ta-nien

How Life Unfolds . . .

The New Path

CHEN CHI

One Saturday evening, I went to interview Wang Shu-yu, a first class construction worker of the Civil Engineering Company of Fu Hsin Coal Mine. I had heard a good deal about him, but never met him. An elderly woman in a blue cotton gown received me at the door.

The house they lived in was quite handsome, with newly painted doors and windows, newly whitewashed walls, and a newly paved floor. Everything looked brand-new, and the occupants seemed to be newly arrived too. For the rooms were in a rather disorderly state, with wardrobe, cupboard, chests, pickle vat, soya sauce jar, pots and pans all piled in the bedroom. On the wall near the *kang* hung a katydid cage made of kaoliang stalks; but it was crammed with red capsicum and dried cabbage.

Wang Shu-yu was squatting on the *kang*, smoking. He jumped down when he saw me and insisted that I sit down. In fact, so warm was his greeting that I had no time to take off my shoes before I was dragged onto the *kang*.

A brood of chicks, startled by my arrival, ran cheeping in all directions; and the elderly woman, evidently Wang's wife, picked up a broom to drive them out, scolding as she did so. All this made me feel as though I were back in a village.

I looked at my host. He was on the short side, with grey hair, ruddy cheeks, and twinkling eyes enmeshed in wrinkles. Smiling cheerfully, he offered me a cigarette as his wife handed me tea.

"Have some tea, comrade," she said. "Don't laugh at the disorder here. We've only just moved to the factory. There's no place for my chicks or sauce jar, and I even have to buy firewood here! It's far less convenient than in the village. There, you can plant two rows of onion on the border of your field and you'll have enough to eat for half a year. Here you have to buy even onions! I tell you, I can't get used to this kind of life!"

Aunty Wang sat down beside me and started gossiping eagerly. She told me she was from Chinchiakou Village in Yihsien.

"All the cadres coming from the county on business stayed in our house. That was a real home. In winter you could eat all the pickles you wanted, and they didn't cost anything because I grew them myself. Here things are different. You have to pay for everything. At this rate, a silver mine would be gone in no time, to say nothing of the wages he makes!"

Old Wang disliked such talk. He kept glancing at her as if to urge her to be quiet. But once she had started she didn't seem able to stop.

"You see, I was living quite comfortably in the village until this old man of mine tricked me into coming here by saying there were opera performances at the mine to celebrate the Spring Festival. Then he gave away our house, our land and practically everything we had. Don't be taken in, comrade, by the quiet way he's sitting there. He was quick enough when it came to giving things away! When I got wind of what he was doing and rushed back, the whole house was empty. Only this katydid cage was left. . . ."

The more Aunty Wang said, the more embarrassed Old Wang became. He kept coughing and wringing his hands, until finally he could bear it no more.

"Stop grumbling!" he said, without waiting for his wife to finish. "You're here now, so what's the use of complaining?"

"Stop grumbling, indeed! The property in the village belonged to both of us. You give it away and won't even allow me to grumble. . . ."

The atmosphere was becoming rather strained when the chicks in the next room relieved the tension by cheeping. Aunty Wang had a look at them, then turned to me.

"Why, comrade, while I've been talking to you that silly old hen has led all the chicks up the stove!"

She hurried out to shoo them off.

"You mustn't laugh at us, comrade," said Old Wang, looking at me with a certain embarrassment. "My old woman is a confirmed grumbler, that's all. She really understands quite well."

"She said just now you had given away your house and land. How did that happen?" I asked.

Old Wang looked a little sheepish.

"That's nothing," he said. "After all these years the Communist Party has educated me, at least I understand that the mine here is my home."

He chuckled.

"That's all very well. But villagers look upon land as the root of life. It's not easy to give it away."

"To be frank with you, comrade, it's nearly five years now since the liberation, and I've struggled with myself for most of those five years. A short time ago, I couldn't have done this. It's a long story."

He grinned, then sipped some tea and sat up to tell me his story.

I've been a village carpenter for over twenty years. I took my hoe to the fields during the busy seasons for farmers, and left the village to ply my trade when work on the land slacked off. Our small cottage and our few *mou* of land cost me Heaven knows how much back-breaking labour and sweat and tears. Country folk say: "Half a *mou* of land is better than a gold bowl." During the puppet Manchukuo and Kuomintang regimes there wasn't much work for carpenters, and most of us went hungry. I was lucky to have those few *mou* of land. The grain I harvested didn't amount to much; but it supplied us with gruel which saved us from starving. That's why I used to say: "Carpentry can't be relied on. Land is the root of life."

Just after liberation, I heard that building was being done in the city, and all the carpenters in my neighbourhood went there to look for jobs. Some of them asked me to go too, but I thought: "I've been on the move half my life, and I'm still poor. Why keep on running around? Better open a small shop in the village. I can carpenter in the shop when there's work and till my fields when there isn't. My eggs will be in two baskets, and if one basket gets knocked over I shall still have the other."

So I opened a shop and hired an assistant. To my surprise, I had plenty of business. People came from far and near to have a waggon or cart made or a plough mended. In less than six months I found the two of us simply could not cope with the orders, and I hired two temporary assistants. I was planning to enlarge my business gradually.

I'd raised the capital for this shop by selling a litter of piglets; so you can see I started in a very small way. Later when I had plenty of orders and was making money, I started keeping accounts and hung up a signboard. I don't know what devil possessed me! After roughing it all my life, I was dreaming of making a fortune in my old age!

Early one morning, I'd just told my apprentice to open the shop, straighten it up and get ready to work, when I noticed a soldier striding past. He was a tall, hefty fellow with a beard, in a green uniform, and had a despatch-case over his shoulder. His face looked familiar, and I felt I'd seen him before.

This soldier stopped too when he saw me, and looked at me hard. Suddenly he called out gaily: "Don't you remember me, Uncle Wang? Didn't you act as our guide that year when the Japanese were finally defeated?"

Then I remembered at once: he was Comrade Sung.

Of course we were pleased to see each other after all those years. I asked him to step in, but he had to go to the district government on urgent

business and left after a few words. I kept thinking of him all that day.

One evening three years before, Comrade Sung had asked me to guide their troops. At that time I didn't know anything about the Liberation Army and I was scared stiff. About seven miles from our village, we heard the enemy was in Shahotun in front of us. All the fighters stooped down to advance, their rifles and machine-guns ready to fire; but I was so terrified I wanted to escape along a little stream. Comrade Sung seized me and said: "Don't run that way, uncle! Further down is the firing line. You're just heading towards bullets!" He took me over a hill and showed me a safe path.

That had happened three years before. Each time I thought of my narrow escape, I remembered Comrade Sung. He saved my life.

To my great joy, I found Comrade Sung was the chief of our district. After that chance meeting, he often came to my shop and talked about the hardships craftsmen had to put up with in the past and told me about the construction work in the city. He always wound up by saying: "If I were you, I would have joined the construction work in the city long ago; for hands are needed there. In any case, it's a fine thing to be a worker. How can a man who's suffered half his life-time like you want to be a boss in his old age and make money through employing other people. You've forgotten all you went through."

At first, I didn't see eye to eye with him. I thought: "Though I own a shop, I'm still working for my living; and I pay my men for the work they do. I'm not cheating or swindling anybody. What's wrong?"

Then one of the apprentices fell ill when I had a lot of orders in hand. I considered his illness a nuisance because it would delay the fulfillment of the orders, and I couldn't help feeling thoroughly annoyed with him. I got up early one morning to drive a donkey to Shahotun. I wanted to collect some grain which a customer there owed me and also see if I could find someone to take the place of the apprentice who was ill.

I had just left our village when I met District Chief Sung, who was going to Shahotun to make arrangements for the spring sowing. As we walked along together I told him my plan to hire another assistant.

"You've worked hard all these years, Old Wang," he said. "Why did you never save any money?"

"Need you ask?" I answered. "In the old days craftsmen had a hard time of it. All the profits were grabbed by the bosses. I thought myself lucky when I could fill my belly."

"True," replied Sung sympathetically. "You were exploited. But though it's several years now since liberation, there are still people who plan to live on exploitation. Do you think it's right to take the old path in this new society?"

I coloured up as I felt his bright eyes fixed on me, and felt pretty uncomfortable.

When we reached the stream near Shahotun, District Chief Sung pointed at it, and asked: "Do you remember that evening three years ago? Firing was going on in front, but you wanted to make off along this stream. What did I say to you?"

"You told me not to follow that path, or I'd come to a dead end."

"Quite right," he said with a laugh. "I'm going to give you the same advice now. Don't follow the path of exploitation. It's a blind alley."

Every word he said was true. I stood by the stream feeling thoroughly shamefaced, as if rooted to the spot.

The next time I heard carpenters were wanted in the city, I closed my shop and went.

The first job I took was on a building site. The unit I headed worked hard. We promised to finish the job in eighteen days, but we actually did it in less than fifteen; and we were given prizes at a fine do with a band playing. When the Construction Committee asked me to work all the year round for capital construction, though, I refused. Though I'd left the village to take a job, that was simply in order to improve my life at home. It was nearly harvest time. The yard needed levelling; the pigsty needed overhauling; there was no end to the jobs waiting for me at home. How could I get myself tied up here? Besides, in the years directly after liberation, craftsmen were in demand everywhere. You know the saying: "As long as the mountain remains, there'll be plenty of fuel to burn." As long as I was my own master, I could make a living anywhere I pleased. So in spite of all the Construction Committee said, I finally left.

Remember this, comrade: When you make a false start in your reasoning, you can't reach a correct conclusion however hard you try. Those few *mou* of land were always on my mind, and I accepted only those jobs that suited me. The private firms in those years were like stinking marshes —one false step and you found yourself stuck. Those crooked merchants always made an attractive offer to begin with; but when they had me hooked they would skimp on work and materials, give less than the wages agreed, and be up to all their dirty tricks.

I worked for a private firm for half a year, then was discharged in the winter. We used to have a saying: "When leaves are green, masons are in demand; when leaves turn yellow, then they're no longer wanted." Jobs for construction workers are seasonal. In winter we always had to find something else to do.

It was a cold winter. I thought I'd better go home. When I entered our gate with my small roll of bedding on my back, my old woman hobbled out to meet me.

"This isn't New Year, nor any festival," she said. "What are you doing here?"

"You know the old rule," I retorted. "Work always stops in the winter. Why ask?"

"Aiya! People say there are training classes now for workmen so that they can study in the winter. Neither of the other men have come back—you're the only one in the whole village!"

I found out later that this was true. There were three craftsmen in our village, and the other two had become full-time workers in capital construction. They drew pay in winter and had the chance to study.

I was full of regrets when I compared myself with them; but then I thought: "I've been able to look after my land this year. After all, land is the root of life. One can't have everything."

My old woman is a grumbler. Because I'd fallen behind the other two craftsmen in this one thing, she kept on at me. She said I was an old good-for-nothing who'd been blinded by a few *mou* of land, that I paid too much attention to trifles with no eye to the main chance, and that now I would sit at home all winter eating through our provisions. In the end, I lost patience.

"All right! All right!" I snapped at her. "I'll join capital construction next year, and you can look after the land."

"Just leave it to me," she answered confidently. "There's a mutual-aid team now. There's not a man or woman in the village who can't work!"

As a matter of fact, my old woman is quite capable. When I was away, she shouldered all the work alone. I didn't get the better of her in that argument, but anyway I'd already reached a decision.

Next spring, I heard that the Civil Engineering Company of Fu Hsin Coal Mine needed workers, and I made enquiries. When I discovered that this was a state-owned enterprise, I joined straight away.

I found plenty that was new on the construction site. In the first place, the men who had attended the winter training classes were quite different from the rest of us village carpenters. They wore spruce uniforms, while we had on black padded jackets, or cloth gowns of all colours and shapes. They worked cheerfully and systematically, while we were in a state of chaos. In the past there would have been no difference—all the old crows were equally black. But now our backwardness hit you in the eye, so that I felt downright ashamed of myself and the group I belonged to.

Then there was another thing: when they talked it was always "*we*" and "*our* company." If anyone made a mistake, the whole group criticized him. If good work was done, the whole group was pleased. They worked like one man, and all for "*us*." But with us village carpenters things were different. Men of the same profession have always been enemies. Carpenter Chang and Carpenter Li would never agree, just as folk from Black Tiger Mountain would never hit it off with those from Pear Tree Village. It was a wonder if we didn't come to blows over the least word of criticism.

At first, when I found myself so far behind the trainees in every way and realized I could never be cock of the walk here, I nearly made up my mind to save up a little money and go home.

Once, when we were building a block of flats, I worked with Li Chen-tung, who had attended the winter training class. He comes from Shaho-tun, and we learned our trade from the same master; but I had not seen him for several years. He had already joined the Party.

"We really aren't doing badly this year, Old Wang," he remarked while we were working. "Look south! For a couple of miles you can see nothing but row after row of new construction sites. At this rate, what will this place be like in a few years' time?"

He smiled happily. From his excitement, you would think he was talking about his own home.

I didn't answer him. "What if this place is well constructed?" I was thinking. "I have helped to put up many buildings since the puppet Manchukuo days. But I'm still living in a tumbledown thatched cottage, aren't I?"

I simply could not understand why he was so happy.

Then May came, and a contest to win the red banner started on our construction site. Li Chen-tung challenged our group of village carpenters, and we accepted the challenge. Why, we were all old hands at our trade, with something of a reputation. We weren't afraid of them!

When the contest began, I was elected head of the village carpenters' unit. We put all our time, energy and skill into that job. We even gave up our midday nap, we were so determined to win. After all our boasting, I decided I'd better show what I could do; so after racking my brains I found a way of building a prefabricated ceiling. But when I told my unit about my plan, they had a lot to say against it. I knew that craftsmen like their own way of doing things, and I couldn't force them to use my plan; so I said nothing and carried on with it alone. In the end, every man in my unit was all in; but even then we didn't win the red banner. I was surprised and decided to find out the other group's secret. I watched them from a corner while they were at work, and after two or three days I began to understand. Do you know why it was? It was thanks to division of labour and collective work. One sawed while another planed. So things went as smoothly as water flowing. In our group, on the other hand, everyone worked independently, and there were always heated arguments about whose work was light and whose was heavy. How could we compare with them?

I saw clearly this time. In our unit it was each man for himself, and we pulled in opposite directions. Their group had a collective way of working, and pulled together. Of course we couldn't compete with them!

From that time on, I admitted defeat. I hung my head when I saw Li's unit, and blushed even before they spoke to me. For who could respect the officer of a defeated army?

But the opposite of what I expected happened: they became more friendly to me after our defeat. When they saw me they'd come over to talk, and they said my plan for the prefabricated ceiling was advanced experience they wanted to learn from me. The blackboard news commended me too. I couldn't make it out; but I was pleased all right. Working for capital construction was a good thing after all. Nowhere else would they have paid any attention to that little plan of mine.

Then I fell ill. For several days I ran a high fever and slept nearly all the time in a sort of coma. A sick man always longs for his family, and I dreamed how fine it would be to be home, with my old woman to make me soup and see that I was comfortable. Here, away from home, who would look after me?

Then I opened my eyes to see apples piled near my pillow and Li Chen-tung beside my bed.

"Who brought these apples?" I asked him.

"The Party secretary," he said with a smile. "He was here a moment ago, but didn't like to wake you. He wanted me to tell you not to worry about anything, but to have a good rest. . . ."

I was very touched. Anyone with a heart would be. The Communist Party was looking after me better than my own family.

This new Workers' Village was ready last October. All the houses are of red brick, and very neat they look too. Doors and windows are brightly varnished, and there's electric light in every room. At first I thought these houses must be for some big government office; but later I learned they were for us workmen.

In the old days, builders lived in crazy matting sheds; and in winter there was a draught from all sides. But now, look! New houses, a new hospital, even a new club house over there!

After working in Fu Hsin for over a year, I finally saw light. Where was my home? The few *mou* of land in the village? The small mud cottage there? No, my home was on the construction site.

To be frank with you, comrade, old folk may be slow in the uptake, but once we see our way clearly we can be just as keen as you young fellows. Not many days ago, when I was about to move into the new Workers' Village, the team leader asked me: "How about your land?"

I told him at once: "I'll give it to the government to divide among the peasants."

I knew quite well that if I hung on to them, that old cottage and those few *mou* of land would always hold me back. Since I wanted to make the construction site my home, I must cut these ties with the past.

When it came to actually giving away the cottage and the land, though, there was another problem. My old woman was village born and village bred. She had lived all her life on the land. I knew she would never agree to giving it away. So when I went back for the Spring Festival, I just told her there would be opera performances in our works and

she was invited. She believed me and left with our eldest son. As soon as they had gone, I began to give things away. I wanted to give the cottage and land to the government, but the government wouldn't take them; so I gave them to the mutual-aid team in our village. What do I want them for, since I've decided to live at the mine? Later when my old woman got wind of what I was doing, she rushed back; but it was too late. She couldn't see things my way, and how she cried. . . .

Old Wang suddenly stopped short. Aunty Wang was standing behind me; but we had no idea when she had come in.

"Who cried? Don't believe him, comrade! He's making it up. I may be an ignorant old woman, still he should have consulted me before moving from the village to the mine! Not to mention everything else, he even gave away my jar of pickled cabbage which has a flavour everybody likes. Haven't I got a right to complain?"

Aunty Wang's sudden appearance had taken me by surprise. Just as I was about to say something soothing, Old Wang winked at me, to hint that I should let her talk. She grumbled for quite a while, scolding her old man; but he only smiled. When she had voiced nearly all her grievances, he suddenly said to me: "By the way, I've heard there's to be a film show this evening."

"Yes. Are you going to see it?"

"That depends on the mistress of the house." He turned to his wife and asked: "Didn't you say you'd like to see a film? This is a very good one in colour. If you'll dress up, we can go together."

"Let's go then. No need for an old woman like me to dress up."

But then she changed her mind and refused to go on the pretext that her eyesight wasn't good. Old Wang coaxed her as playfully and fondly as a child, until in the end Aunty Wang had to give in.

"Won't you ever learn to behave?" she scolded. "Let's go then."

Old Wang nudged me on the sly when we got out of the house, and pulled me aside to say: "Don't laugh at me, comrade. I want her to see the film so that she will understand more. Her old ways of thinking have got to be changed. . . ."

I had seen the film, so I didn't go with them. On my way home I had plenty of food for thought. In my mind's eye I could see the cheerful, open old man helping his wife forward just as fast as he could go towards a new life. Yet he seemed to be afraid others might laugh at him; so he was explaining himself even as he ran!

Translated by Tso Cheng

A Letter

CHOU CHING

It all happened quite unexpectedly. The postman delivered a strange letter that had neither the name of a place nor of a person on it to the office of Building Section No. 7; the envelope simply said: "To the Farthest Frontline Fighters on the Railway Construction Site." That certainly made it an interesting puzzle to solve.

The secretary of the Building Section No. 7 did not dare open the letter and sent it on to the section head, to let him decide what to do with it.

"Who really can we say is farthest up front?" Turning the envelope meditatively in his hand, the section head finally decided: "Yes, it probably is for us! Our section is ahead of over thirty other units, so it must be for us!"

He quickly tore the letter open and read it through line for line. A happy smile spread over his face when he had finished reading. With an elation unusual for an elderly man like him, he scribbled something on the envelope and called for a messenger to take it to the Ninth Working Site in a hurry.

When the head of that site received the letter, he looked it over curiously before he pulled out the written pages. When he had read all there was to read, he smiled to himself: "No, we can't be considered to be at the farthest frontline, this must go to Leading Group No. 5!" So the strange letter travelled to that group where it had a stopover of only a few minutes before it was on its way again, this time to the Twelfth Brigade. The Twelfth Brigade turned it over to the Shock-Work Squad No. 7, and thence it went to the Surveyors' Group.

When Li Wen-sheng of the Surveyors' Group hastily opened the flap of their tent, he startled the other two members Hsiao Tien and Li Chun, one of whom was reading a book lying on his cot, while the other was writing his diary.

"Why all this fuss?" Hsiao Tien was annoyed at the interruption when he was engrossed in the book.

"What fuss?" Li Wen-sheng adjusted his white-rimmed glasses while he showed them the letter. "Look, how strange—a messenger has brought us this from the Shock-Work Squad No. 7!"

He held up the letter for his mates to see—the envelope slightly wrinkled from all the travelling.

"Who is it for?" The two asked in one voice.

The most welcome person on a construction site being the postman who brings news of faraway homes, relatives, friends, and loved ones, both Li Chun and Hsiao Tien jumped up and tried to snatch the letter from Wen-sheng.

"You can't grab it like this!" Wen-sheng pressed the letter protectingly against his chest. "It isn't for anybody in particular!"

"Then who is it for?" They held up their hands in wonder.

"It's for all of us, but very strangely addressed!" He put the letter on the desk, turned up the oil lamp a bit, and three heads bent over it together.

"To the Farthest Frontline Fighters on the Railway Construction Site!" The Surveyors' Group Leader Li Chun was intrigued by this address. His colleagues nudged him: "Go on, read it!"

Li Chun pulled the written sheets very carefully out of the envelope and began reading:

Dear Comrades:

You will perhaps be surprised by this letter which I feel I must write you. I don't know the place you're at nor the unit you belong to, so all I can do is put "To the Farthest Frontline Fighters on the Railway Construction Site" on the envelope. This will of course make it very difficult for the postman and many other comrades, but I'm sure it'll finally reach its destination.

First of all, let me extend my greetings to you who do your work at the foremost frontline of our national construction for socialism. I want to express my gratitude to the many thousands of builders on the railway line who serve the people by bringing the various parts of our country closer together. This is how I feel about you, although I cannot put all my emotions about what you're doing into words.

I am a member of the fighters guarding the coastline of our country. My home used to be a small village lost way up in the mountains. When I went home on furlough this time, however, I found it much changed. When I had last visited it two years ago, I had first to take a train, then a bus for over a hundred miles, and then I still had to walk about twenty-seven miles before I was really home. But this time—when I got off at the railway station, I was struck dumb when the loudspeaker announced that passengers going north could take another train, and there was the name of my own village among those to which this other train was going! You can imagine how pleased and amazed I was, all at the same time! Riding on the train up north to our village, I could hardly keep still with the excitement. Looking out of the window, I saw beautiful fields mile after mile, quiet villages with dykes newly built along the banks of the river on both sides of the railway. In the fields the crops stood tall

and rich. All the time I was repeating to myself, "How beautiful our country is! And all the change that's come about in just a few years. . . . I'll do my best to defend this country of ours, and any bandit who dares poke his nose in, I'll smash that nose for him!"

Two years ago, I had spent two days in travelling when I went home. This time, I got right to our own door-step in a few hours' train ride. My old village has changed because of the railway that you have built. All the houses have tiled roofs now, there is a co-operative store and even a cultural centre. Our village can ship a lot of agricultural produce and products from sidelines to the cities by train now, and exchange them for what we need in the village including fertilizer and new farm tools. And the prices we pay are very moderate, too! People in my village now read the *People's Daily* one day after it's been published in Peking, and they get the latest pictorials almost as soon as they're out. They even see films shown by projection teams right there in the village! Many of the villagers have gone to work on construction sites like yourselves. . . .

Dear Comrades, because you have shortened our country's road to socialism, I must thank you heartily. I'm very sorry I didn't get the chance of talking to you in person when I was home the last time. So I felt I must write you as soon as I got back to the coastguard, to thank you one and all of the tens of thousands who are working in such a selfless spirit on the national construction front. With my warmest greetings I am,

Liu Piao
Coastguard Fighter

Under their oil lamp, Li Chun had read the letter through aloud for his colleagues. The two others drew a deep breath—all three were so deeply moved that they remained silent for quite a while. The tent was very quiet, only now and then a gust of wind whistled over the canvas.

Finally Li Wen-sheng took off his glasses, wiped them carefully and said: "I have often wondered what our work was really worth. Sometimes I even felt it was monotonous and mechanical. This letter brings home to me that what we're doing is really important." He put his glasses back on and walked agitatedly up and down.

"That's true!" Hsiao Tien echoed him, his big eyes shining with excitement, and gave a toss to the curl that hung into his forehead. "Before, I did know of course that it was the right thing to take part in capital construction, but I never thought about it enough. This letter now makes it quite clear how much what we're doing means to all the people right in their daily life everywhere in the country."

His bushy brows tightly knit, their group leader Li Chun was thinking the letter over. He was just as excited as his two mates. A feeling of pride and glory in his work welled up from his heart, such as he had never sensed before. He finally managed to say: "We'll write back and say we are just as determined as he is to make our country happier and more beautiful!" The others supported him fully. Then the three lapsed into silence again, thinking about what else they should say in their reply. After a while, Li Wen-sheng spoke up: "Perhaps we should say that we'll complete the railway line ahead of schedule. No, better say that we'll devote all our lives to the building of railways, that we'll finish every line ahead of schedule, so that trains will reach every place in our land, bring wealth and happiness everywhere. . . ." And with a glance asking for the support of his comrades he ventured: "Let's say that neither mountains nor rivers can stop us, and that we'll make trains run across deserts and grasslands to every corner of our country!"

"That's right, that's what we'll say!" Hsiao Tien was enthusiastic about what Wen-sheng had just said. Li Chun, too, was filled with the same soaring spirit as he said: "What you've just proposed sounds all right to me, but we shall also have to tell him about our present work. I think we must say in the letter that we'll be both very careful and quick in checking over the results of our surveying work, so that construction will be better and faster!"

Snatches of working songs came to them on the soft breeze. Unconsciously, the three of them were drawn towards these songs out of the tent into the dark. Night should be still, but here the voices of people struggling against nature prevailed. The light from big storm lamps lit up the sky; there were the rhythmic throaty calls of groups of people clamping down the earth with a big stone or carrying it in shoulder-pole baskets.

"Look!" Li Chun was pointing in the direction from which the shouts came. "This is a race with time! And from now on, we shall put even bigger efforts into pushing the farthest frontline still further ahead."

Translated by Chang Su-chu

On the Road to the Construction Site

FAN PIAO

I set out for the construction site of a power plant at about five in the morning one early winter day. It was still dark. The bud-like crescent moon glimmered faintly overhead and a sprinkling of stars hung in the sky. On the highway I came upon an empty fly rumbling towards

the construction site. After exchanging a word with the driver, I climbed in.

It was so dark that I could hardly see ten paces ahead. Several times we nearly collided with pedestrians and vehicles coming from the opposite direction. I learnt in the course of conversation that the driver was a young fellow called Wang.

"All four-footed creatures can see in the dark," he told me. "And this iron-grey mule from our co-op is sharper than most. With this mule between the traces on a dark night, I don't have to worry however rough the road is, to say nothing of a smooth highway like this. He pulls up himself if he comes to any pits or obstacles. And he remembers any journey he has made twice."

After talking with gusto for some time, the driver wrapped his huge sheepskin round him, rested his head against one side of the fly and, curling himself up, fell into a doze.

When we were less than a mile from the site, a girl's clear voice rang out in front of us: ". . . But you must agree not to stop me from welding after we're married."

"Of course," replied the man with her. "I shall be egging you on. As team leader of the welders, how could I stand in your way?"

"Well, I certainly hope that's the way it'll be. But let me tell you"—the girl raised her voice—"something that happened here before you came."

I heard all this distinctly, probably because there was a mild northwester blowing our way and all was quiet around us. From their voices and footsteps you could tell there were only the two of them ahead of us. All of a sudden Wang pushed the sheepskin aside and sat up. He leaned forward to listen, nudging me with his elbow.

". . . We had five women welders here before you came," the girl was saying. "We were a team on our own, with me at the head. Lao Chin was married; she was a bit older than the others. The rest of us were all under twenty. In the spring of 1952, you know, the Northwest Power Company engaged quite a few girls as apprentice welders. After learning the trade for six months in the Northeast, we were transferred to various construction sites all over the country. We five came to Shansi and were promoted to be third-grade welders. Everything was fine during the first few months. We used to challenge the men to beat us at the job, and tried to do everything on our own. We wanted to show people we could do a good job of work too. I'm not bragging. Everybody admitted we were doing all right.

"But you know what happened later? In six months, two of the girls had given up as a result of getting married. Nobody's got anything against marriage, of course; but it oughtn't to have kept them away from welding. Little Huang was the first. Her husband was an office worker, a draughtsman in the Designing Section, and I don't mind telling

you I have no high opinion of those office workers with their lackadaisical ways, who can't hit it off with the workers. Still, that didn't matter, so long as they got on all right with each other. But barely two months had passed before Little Huang left us to learn drawing with her husband. It's difficult to learn a new trade. Why should she want to switch jobs? Why do a thing like that when the country has trained you for three years and you're just beginning to be a welder?"

"Was she a good welder?"

"No! Her work looked a mess. Still, she managed somehow—that was the main thing. But it was no good if her ideas were all mixed up. And I thought that husband of hers was having a bad influence on her, because she'd stopped thinking like a worker."

"Why didn't you try to talk her round?"

"We did! The superintendent and Party Secretary and other comrades talked to her for hours on end. But she wouldn't listen to any of us. In the end the administration had to have her and her husband transferred. This was the fine trick Little Huang played on us.

"Well, then Little Hsieh found a husband too, an electrician. At first we thought there was nothing to worry about in her case. A welder and an electrician ought to make a perfect match! Who could have guessed that Little Hsieh would want to change her job too? Pretending that she couldn't do any more climbing because she had rheumatism, she decided to learn to be an electrician. After a few days at her new job, she realized it was not much fun starting from scratch again, and that an electrician had even more climbing to do. So she wanted to come back. But she had made such a bad impression on us all that the administration thought it wiser to put her in some other team. I just wonder what made Huang and Hsieh hanker after something new and find it impossible to settle down. . . .

"Now there were only three of us left in the team. Lao Chin was married, and Shu-fang and I were single. Shu-fang and I laid our heads together one day, and decided that while we should keep our eyes open for likely men, we must never make the same mistake as Huang and Hsieh."

"And was I the most likely man you could find?" asked the team leader with a laugh.

"Don't interrupt. Let me finish the story."

She paused, then went on in a lower voice, which still carried distinctly: "To tell you the truth, Shu-fang was secretly keeping an eye on me. Soon after your arrival she said to me: 'We're still young; let's not look for husbands yet. Let's concentrate on working; don't you agree?' I knew she was trying to sound me out. 'Well,' I said, 'it's not wrong for a girl to want to get married. It all depends on the kind of man she picks. If he's the sort who's going to hold her back and interfere with her work, then the sooner she gives him up the better. It's all up to her!'

"When we two became friendly, Shu-fang spotted it at once. 'There's something between you and our team leader!' she challenged me one day. 'Don't talk nonsense,' I said, trying to put her off. 'I'm not good enough for him. But I give you my word, whomever I marry I'll stick to my job. If you don't believe me, just wait and see.' Girls, you know, don't like to talk about such things before they're sure of themselves. And, frankly, I wasn't too sure of you either at that time.

"When I went home on leave Shu-fang came to the station to see me off: and just as the train was about to start, she came right up to the carriage window. 'Tell your mother about it and ask her for her advice,' she said. 'About what?' I asked, popping my head out. 'About getting married without giving up welding. What else could I mean?' I was surprised how much she had taken it to heart; but on second thoughts I realized there was really little to wonder at. Everybody would feel the same in her place. Take myself, for example. Whether it came to anything or not, I was interested in you, while Shu-fang still hadn't any idea who her husband would be. We wanted to go on welding all our life, and were afraid of picking a man who might make us change our minds. How could we take such a question anything but seriously?

"My arrival home created quite a stir in the village. Neighbours, old schoolmates and teachers all flocked to see me, and said how well I was doing. My old friends looked at me admiringly and asked question after question, and I told them a lot of things. After all the visitors had left that evening it was mum's turn—she *is* such a darling! When I told her about all the machines we have on the construction site, she wanted to see pictures of them.

"Somehow or other your name kept cropping up. 'Why do you keep bringing in your team leader?' asked mum suddenly, with a twinkle in her eye. That question nearly floored me! 'I hear you working girls often pick up boy friends on the sly,' she went on with a smile. 'Have you got one too?' 'Of course not!' I said, seizing the opportunity to sound her out on the subject. 'You told me to give all my mind to my work, didn't you?' At that she laughed. 'Well,' she said, 'I was only trying to find out whether you have put your whole heart in your work or not.' I tell you, mum has quite a sense of humour!"

"Why didn't you tell her the truth?" the team leader asked.

The girl's only reply was a laugh.

"I did a bit of thinking at home," she went on. "I asked myself what it was that made it possible for an ignorant country girl like me to work with my welding-rod on the construction site of one of our key industrial projects—a project to which the people of the whole nation have turned their eyes? It could never have happened but for the training the country has given me! And why should our neighbours and friends make so much of me? Why, just because they understood the importance of heavy industry in building up socialism, and knew I had stuck to my job. If I

were irresponsible enough to follow the example of Little Hsieh, no one would pay any more attention to me. And I would be too ashamed to look anyone in the face. We have to set a high standard for ourselves, don't you agree?

"I spent some time thinking about our future too. You've been a worker ever since you were a boy, and now you're highly skilled and a team leader; yet you're always patient with people who need your help. That's why I've fallen for you. I thought you could . . ." she lowered her voice, so that the next words were lost.

"Did you never tell your mother?" asked the team leader.

"No. There's no hurry, is there? I mean to write her about it soon."

We were now drawing nearer and nearer to the construction site. The ring of metal sounded from time to time, and shafts of blue light flashed from the windows of the great factory buildings where welders were at work. I had a sudden vision of the young couple before us working away with selfless devotion, their masked faces lit up by the brilliant light.

"There was a time when I was busy taking stock of you too," blurted out the team leader. "Not long after my arrival three women welders were sent to my team. It didn't take me long to spot you as the keenest of the three. Lao Chin, who's a few years older than you, plods steadily along at her work. Young Shu-fang is not too dependable. Always anxious to do more and do it better, you were the pick of the bunch. I was already interested in you then, though I didn't dare tell you so for fear of being snubbed. . . .

"Since you came back, you've worked even better. You remember that extra night shift we had some time ago welding flanges? I considered the work too heavy and difficult for you; but you insisted on doing it, and accused me of looking down upon women workers! So I was forced to give in. 'There's a girl with a will of her own!' I thought. During the night I slipped in to watch over your shoulders; but you were kneeling on the ground, too absorbed in your work to notice me. The second time I looked in it was nearly daybreak, and I heard you call out while you struggled to your feet. Kneeling all that time must have given you pins and needles. 'However strong her will is, she'll find it hard to keep this up for eight or ten years,' I told myself. 'And what will she do when she's given heavier jobs to handle? I wonder how long she'll be able to stick it?' You see, because I loved you I'd begun to worry about you. But while I stood there thinking this, you suddenly turned round and smiled all over your face when you saw me. You were taking it in your stride. Now I realize I need never have worried. . . . Well, when are you going to name the day?"

"When I've learnt high-pressure welding," said the girl after a short pause. "Is that all right with you?"

"That should be pretty soon! With your grounding and some effort, you should be able to master it in no time."

"We have to look after Shu-fang too, don't forget!"

"That's right. You've got to think of others."

"That's your responsibility as well. Otherwise, what's the good of your being team leader?"

We were now approaching the entrance of the construction site. A sea of glittering lights stretched before us, and the sky was growing whiter. The two young people in front of us could be seen clearly now.

Workers emerged from the hostel and crossed the road, walking in twos and threes towards the site for the morning shift. The young couple, silent now, walked on side by side quite naturally, greeting their friends from time to time.

"You're up early!"

"Have you two been out so early?"

"We've just been out for a breath of fresh air before the morning shift."

"Fine!"

Wang gave the horse the reins, and cracked his whip. He was eager, as I was, to outstrip the lovers and have a good look at them.

I was amazed to find that the woman welder looked no more than eighteen—a mere chit of a girl! She was quite unlike the figure I had pictured to myself while listening to her wise, sensible talk. But there could be no mistake; for she was the only girl on the road. The team leader could not have been much more than twenty-two either, and looked slight but capable. They made a handsome couple.

I jumped down from the fly. The driver, his eyes fixed on the two welders, didn't even notice me go.

When I sat down to work in the trade union office, the faces of the woman welder and her team leader kept haunting my mind. I felt a twinge of conscience at having eavesdropped, although unwittingly; but the love and warmth of the young pair had been as refreshing as the morning air. You just could not help drinking it in!

Translated by Yuan Ko-chia

CHRONICLE

Commemorating Three Famous Works of Art

China's writers and artists have responded to the proposal made by the World Peace Council by organizing a series of meetings and activities to commemorate the 1,500th anniversary of India's Ajanta murals, the centenary of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and the 350th anniversary of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.

The Ajanta commemoration meeting was held under the joint auspices of the Chinese People's Committee for World Peace, the China-India Friendship Association, the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the Union of Chinese Artists. It was attended by leaders and representatives of various people's organizations, outstanding supporters of the peace movement, archaeologists, professors, writers and artists, representatives of the world peace movement who were in Peking, foreign youth delegates and members of the foreign diplomatic corps. The Indian Ambassador N. Raghavan and his wife, the Indian archaeologist Dr. N. P. Chakravarti and his wife, and Dr. K. Deb Barman, Dean of the Academy of Arts of the Vishvabharti University, were among the distinguished Indian guests present.

The twenty-nine Ajanta caves with their splendid murals are situated on the edge of the Deccan Plateau in western India. They were built between the 2nd century B.C. and the 7th century A.D. Most of the murals are devoted to religious themes, but closely linked to secular life they also vividly portray the everyday life of the times in which they were painted. The famous Chinese monk Hsuan Chuang who studied in India between 629 and 645 describes the Ajanta temple caves in his *Memoirs on Western Countries Published in the Tang Dynasty*.

Both in subject-matter and in style the Ajanta frescoes have much in common with murals in many of China's ancient grottoes. The arts of China and India exerted a direct influence on each other over a considerable period of time. Wu Cho-jen, Vice-Chairman of the Union of Chinese Artists, speaking of the mural art of Ajanta, pointed out that the drawing of some of the figures in the Ajanta murals suggests the use of line in Chinese calligraphy. Chen Han-sheng, Vice-President of the China-India Friendship Association, said in his address that the art of the Ajanta caves had long been a symbol of the friendship and cultural exchange between India and China.

An exhibition devoted to the Ajanta murals was also held in Peking. It included over 200 coloured reproductions and enlarged copies of the murals, and books about the art of Ajanta.

The Chinese people have long been familiar with Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. As early as 1920, in one of his poems, Kuo Mo-jo hailed Whitman, "who is like the mighty Pacific." Both in spirit and in form this poem shows a close affinity with Whitman's own creations. Many of our other poets have also been influenced by Whitman's works. *Don Quixote* has long been very popular with Chinese readers. In recent months, newspapers and magazines throughout the country have carried quite a number of articles about these famous works.

The meeting commemorating these anniversaries was held under the auspices of the Chinese People's Committee for World Peace, the Chinese People's As-

sociation for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the Union of Chinese Writers. Among the 1,300 people who attended the meeting were China's leaders in the world peace movement, poets, authors, critics, musicians, workers and people from other walks of life, foreign visitors in Peking and members of the diplomatic corps. The platform included the noted American singer Aubrey Pankey, Jose Giral, Member of the Standing Committee of the World Peace Council and Chairman of the Spanish Peace Committee, and the Spanish poet Cesar M. Arconada.

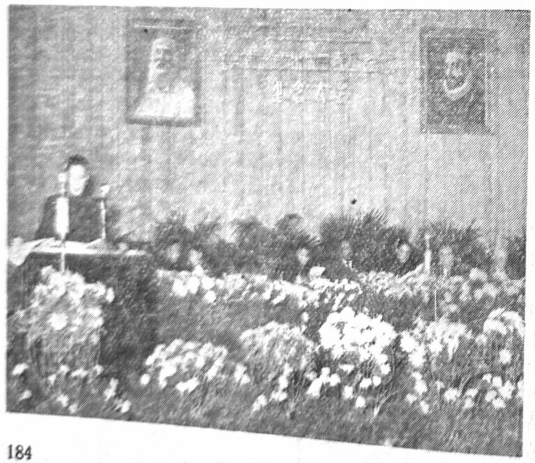
Mao Tun, Chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers, in his opening address stated, "There is one feature common to the two works, *Leaves of Grass* and *Don Quixote*, and that is an ardent yearning for a peaceful life for the common people. Both these masterpieces are expressions of this lofty ideal." Pointing out the fact that supporters of world peace and leaders in the field of culture in the native lands of Whitman and Cervantes have been prevented from visiting China and attending the celebration of these anniversaries, he added, "But even such things cannot weaken our friendship with the peoples of all countries, the United States of America included. Our commemoration of Walt Whitman, the poet of the American people, is ample proof of this."

China's noted critic and Vice-Chairman of the Writers' Union, Chou Yang, discussed the contribution these two famous books have made to the progressive culture of mankind.

Mao Tun then read cables of greetings received from the American singer Paul Robeson, the American literary critic Samuel Sillen, the Chilean poet Angel Crachaga Santa Maria and the Uruguayan writer Sosa Olivera Jesualdo and his wife Maria Carmen.

The well-known American singer Aubrey Pankey took "Walt Whitman, the People's Poet" as the theme of his address. Jose Giral talked on "Cervantes, the Man and His Work." They spoke of the influence which the two writers had had on the lands of their birth. The Spanish poet Cesar M. Arconada recited his poem especially written for the occasion, "Don Quixote in China."

The warmth of the atmosphere of this meeting amply demonstrated the love which the Chinese people have for these two famous works. As Chou Yang said in his address, "The just societies of which Whitman and Cervantes dreamed, the splendid cities and the new people have long since come into being and are going victoriously forward. *Leaves of Grass* and *Don Quixote* belong to the people of the world. They will live forever."



Chou Yang speaking on Whitman and Cervantes

Surkov in China

Alexei Surkov, the well-known poet and first secretary of the Secretariat of the Union of Soviet Writers, has paid a visit to China as leader of the Soviet Cultural Delegation which attended 1955 National Day celebrations in the capital.

The delegation also visited Sian, Chungking, Canton, Shanghai and Hangchow. At all these centres, in addition to the normal schedule of activities of the delegation, local literary circles were able to discuss Soviet literary developments with the delegation's indefatigable leader. He found time even during a brief three hours' stopover in Wuhan to make a report on Soviet literature to local writers.

In Peking he was able to exchange views with many of China's leading writers. One discussion, chaired by Mao Tun, Chairman of the Union of Chinese Writers, was attended by a score or so of writers, poets, research workers in Soviet literature and editors of various literary journals. Surkov spoke on the Party spirit of Soviet literature, the training of Soviet writers and the experience of the Union of Soviet Writers in organizing the creative activities of the writers.

At another gathering sponsored by the Union of Chinese Playwrights and Stage Artists, he exchanged opinions with Chinese theatre and film workers on Chinese drama, films, music and the dance.

Thanks to the opportunity afforded by the visit of the delegation and its distinguished leader, Chinese literary and art circles have been able to get first-hand information on the work and organizational activities of their Soviet colleagues.

Surkov chats with Chinese writers

Japanese Woodcut Exhibition

Peking, Shanghai and a number of other cities recently have been privileged to see a new exhibition of Japanese woodcuts. The exhibition was in two parts: original modern woodcuts and wood-block reproductions of paintings. Most of the modern woodcuts among the 153 works displayed mirror the present-day life of the Japanese people, their sufferings, struggles and hopes. Makoto Ueno's "The Victims of the Atom Bomb Accuse" and "Fukuryu Maru No. 5" are moving expressions of the compassion felt by the Japanese people for the victims of the Hiroshima atom bomb and their anger over the use of atomic weapons. (The

Fukuryu Maru is the name of the Japanese fishing trawler, one of whose crew died as a result of contamination by radio-active ash from a U.S. H-bomb test.)

"Stray Bullets" by Hiroharu Nii illustrates an incident when a Japanese child was killed and another wounded by U.S. troops firing practice rounds on a range. The sorrow and anger of the parents is vividly delineated in their faces. Kenji Suzuki's "At a U.S. Army Base" shows the just anger of the Japanese people as it boils over into action. They are tearing down barbed-wire entanglements and boards bearing the insulting words: "No Japanese Allowed."

In "Talking About New China," Ichiro Oguchi describes the joy and inspiration which the Japanese people derive from the achievements of New China. "Don't Forget Hanaoka!" a joint work by Hiroharu Nii and Jiro Takidaira, is a story in 56 engravings of how, during China's war of resistance to Japanese aggression, a group of Chinese prisoners of war in Japan were brutally done to death at the Hanaoka Mine in Akita. These woodcuts, characterized by their sparse treatment and bold, expressive strokes, also show the friendship forged between the peoples of China, Japan and Korea in their common struggle against Japanese militarism.

The exhibition also contained some attractive landscapes. "Factory Area" and "Landscape" by Senpan Maekawa are remarkable for their skilful colour composition. "Snow Scene in the Countryside" by Tadashi Nakayama is marked by solid, forceful engraving. All these coloured woodcuts have that simplicity, conciseness and strength that we have learnt to expect from Japanese woodcuts.

The reproduction of original paintings by means of wood-blocks has had a long tradition among Japanese artist-craftsmen. The reproductions at this exhibition showed a high degree of artistry and skill both in the cutting of the wood-blocks and in printing. The affinities between this method of reproduction and that used by the Jung Pao Chai of Peking attest to the mutual influence which Japanese and Chinese artists and craftsmen have exerted upon each other. The unfortunate thing is that, under U.S. military occupation, Japan's national culture is being trampled on and stifled, the art of reproduction by means of wood-blocks among other things is also suffering. This explains why the majority of the fine wood-block reproductions on display at the exhibition were those done twenty or thirty years ago.

This is the third time during the past several years that Japanese woodcuts have been exhibited in China, and afforded the Chinese people an opportunity of getting a better understanding of the life and art of their neighbours.

The Victims of the Atom Bomb Accuse **By Makoto Ueno**

A Visit from Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir

Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were given a hearty welcome by Chinese writers when they arrived last September to start a seven week visit to New China. Besides attending the National Day celebrations in Peking and touring other parts of the country, the two French writers had a number of meetings with their Chinese writer colleagues. At a discussion arranged by the Chinese Writers' Union, views were exchanged on literature, and particularly the drama. The novelists Chou Li-po, Ai Wu, Chen Hsueh-chao and Yang Shuo and the playwright Tsao Yu were present to greet the French guests.

Sartre expressed enthusiastic admiration for the Chinese classical opera. He described it as an excellent vehicle for expressing the conflicts of a whole era on a more complicated scale. It is not bound by the traditional Western dramatic unities of time and place. Its characters are symbolic: four guards on the stage can represent thousands of troops. He noted these characteristic differences from the theatre of the West which he held to be mainly suited to describing conflicts between individuals. He was particularly interested in the great variety of local forms of Chinese opera.

M. Sartre and Mme. De Beauvoir met many other leading Chinese writers during their stay in the capital. They had a lively talk with the novelist and playwright Lao Sheh, Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Writers' Union, who is well acquainted with the life of old Peking and is a people's deputy of new Peking. At a luncheon with Ting Ling, another Vice-Chairman of the Writers' Union, M. Sartre expressed his appreciation of her novel *The Sun Shines over the Sangkan River.*

The French writers were also entertained at a reception by Chen Yi, Vice-Premier of the State Council, at which Mao Tun, Chairman of the Writers' Union, Hsia Yen, playwright and Vice-Minister of Culture, and Yang Hansheng, author and Vice-President of the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, were also present.

The magazine *I Wen*—World Literature—carried a translation of Sartre's play *Lizzie* (The Respectable Prostitute) in its issue of November last year.

Jean-Paul Sartre

Czechoslovak Writers on New China

A number of books on the new China by Czechoslovak writers and artists who visited this country have been warmly received by readers and critics in Czechoslovakia.

National Artist Marie Majerova's *Singing China*, a collection of reportage, stories, letters, features and poems in prose, was awarded a Klement Gottwald State Prize, First Class, last year. They tell of the heroic women who took part in the Chinese Red Army's Long March, of college girls, of the heroes of the Chinese People's Volunteers who have returned from Korea, of women members of shock brigades and women workers in textile mills. They tell of the epoch-making changes wrought in the life of the Chinese people by the victory of the revolution. In her collection of poems, *The Chinese Smile*, National Artist Marie Pujmanova records impressions gathered during a tour of China. Simply, sincerely, she expresses a great love for the Chinese people and deep admiration for their achievements in history. She describes the beauty of Peking, sings a tribute to Chairman Mao Tse-tung, and celebrates the radiant smile of New China's women and children. She introduces her readers to the woman writer Ting Ling and the venerable painter Chi Pai-shih. She too has an admirable piece on the legendary Long March.

Poet and writer Adolf Hoffmeister has contributed two new works: *Postcards from China* and *Kuo Khua* (Chinese painting). The first is reportage on life in the new China illustrated with drawings and photographs. The writer takes his readers to Peking, Shanghai, and Dairen, to Shaoshan, the village in Hunan Province where Chairman Mao Tse-tung was born, and to the village of Changkuochuang which has established its own special bonds of friendship with a village in Czechoslovakia. Hoffmeister gives a poetic description of the beauty of China's landscape, and of her diligent, hard working people and their achievements. *Kuo Khua* is an introduction to China's classical art, folk art and especially the Chinese woodcut. It describes the centuries-old evolution of the techniques of China's pictorial arts. The author also introduces his readers to several of the artists of China today, including the venerable ninety-four-year-old Chi Pai-shih himself and a very young cartoonist. In addition to many reproductions of Chinese pictorial art showing the various forms and stages of its development, this attractive book contains a number of sketches by the author himself.

Spring in China, a collection of reportage by Jarmila Glazarova, and an album of contemporary Chinese paintings by L. Hajek, *Chinese Art*, complete this little library of books which is an eloquent expression of the love and admiration the people of Czechoslovakia have for China, for the Chinese people and their art.

Chinese Operas on the Screen

The very considerable success which the screen version of the Shaohsing opera *Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai** has enjoyed, has encouraged the studios to press ahead with their plans to film other local operas. Five more of them have recently been filmed. Their stories are all taken from well-known historical episodes or legends. All are favourites of generations of opera-goers as true and vivid reflections of the people's life and strivings in the old days. In the best tradition of Chinese drama they extol upright men and women and castigate the vices of the old society—injustice, hypocrisy, snobbery and selfishness; they sing the praises of the pure in heart, the brave, and express the people's age-long wish for a better, happier life.

* See *Chinese Literature*, No. 1, 1955, p. 199.

Scene from "Chin Hsiang-lien"

Chin Hsiang-lien, the first of the new films, is in the *ping chu* style which is popular in Hopei and the Northeast. Though it draws to a certain extent on the classical Peking opera, its language is the colloquial language of the people and several of its plays are taken from contemporary life. The present play, however, is based on an old story of the Sung Dynasty (960-1279). Chin Hsiang-lien's husband has left her to seek official preferment. She doesn't hear from him for many years but finally, during a famine in her home district, she goes with her children to seek him at the capital. He in fact has succeeded brilliantly at the imperial examinations and married a daughter of the emperor. He has disowned Hsiang-lien and the children, and even sends an assassin in an attempt to murder them. Hsiang-lien appeals to the mayor of the capital, an upright official, who refuses to allow the law to be suborned by the imperial court.

Scene from "A Golden Seal Is Tried by Fire"

Undismayed by official opposition he sentences the faithless husband and would-be murderer to death.

The Fukien opera, *A Golden Seal Is Tried by Fire*, is the story of two minor officials who have lost their jobs because they stood up for the people. However, with the help of a forged seal of wax, they install themselves in the office of local imperial inspector. They administer the law justly and redress many wrongs. Finally the real inspector arrives and a dispute arises as to who is the genuine representative of the emperor. It is decided to put the case to the test by passing the two seals of office of the contending parties through fire. The two just impostors manage to substitute the real seal for their wax one just before the test. They are recognized as the legal holders of the office, put the real inspector under arrest as an impostor and succeed in making good their escape.

The Shansi opera *Chastising the Princess* is based on a story of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The emperor's daughter has been married to the son of Kuo Tzu-yi, a national hero who has saved the country from the invader. The proud princess, however, thinks it beneath her dignity to bow before one of her father's subjects. She refuses to do the customary obeisance before her father-in-law on his birthday. Her husband admonishes her with a slap. Enraged, she rushes to the palace to complain to the empress who in turn asks the emperor to punish the Kuos. The emperor, however, sees the incident in its proper light and himself explains things to the proud princess. She is finally reconciled to her husband and the proper relations are established in the family.

The Yangchow opera (from Kiangsu Province), *Going to the Chin Mountain*, and the Huangmei opera from Anhwei, *The Marriage of the Heavenly Princess*, are both delightful mythological tales that have long been popular favourites. The first is part of the famous story *The Tale of the White Snake*,* whose theme is the faithfulness of the heroine and her bitter struggle to defend her love and lover from the feudal forces that would part them. The second is the story of the seventh daughter of the Emperor of Heaven who longs to live among human beings and overcomes many obstacles to go into the world and marry the man of her choice.

Intelligent film treatment has enhanced the charm of these old operas. Veteran opera-goers say it gives them a new appreciation of their favourites by bringing out the finest points of acting and dramatic subtlety. In the old days enjoyment of these local forms of opera was pretty well restricted to their immediate locality. The cinema has brought them wide popularity throughout the country wherever they have been seen.

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* See *Chinese Literature*, No. 2, 1953, p. 26.

In Commemoration of Nieh Erh and Hsien Hsing-hai

The Chinese people have recently commemorated the death of two outstanding composers, the founders of China's socialist-realist music: Nieh Erh, who died in 1935, and Hsien Hsing-hai, who died ten years ago.

It was at a time of growing national crisis, in the early thirties, when the Japanese imperialists were intensifying their aggression against China and the reactionary Chiang Kai-shek clique was carrying out a policy of abject surrender to the foreign invader coupled with ruthless oppression of the people that Nieh Erh composed his *March of the Volunteers** with its clarion call: "Arise! All ye who refuse to be bond slaves!" This song, with words by Tien Han, was written as the theme song of the film *Children of the Storm*; but it had a significance far beyond its original intention; it became the song of the Chinese people in their battle for freedom. This was only

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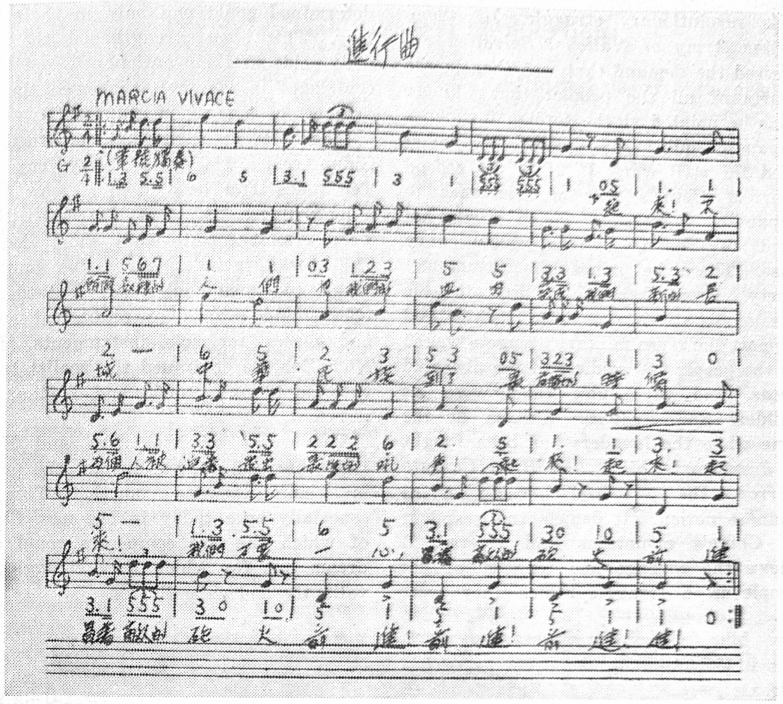
* Now played as the national anthem of the People's Republic of China.



Nieh Erh's manuscript of the "March of the Volunteers"

one of Nieh Erh's grand, patriotic songs. With a broad sweep, rousing rhythm and breathing a spirit of confidence in final victory, they quickly became known all over the country; they were a tremendous inspiration to the people in their struggle against Japanese aggression.

Song of the Road Builders, *Trail Blazers* and other popular songs by Nieh Erh were inspired by the heroic courage of China's working class. He was the first composer in the history of modern Chinese music to sing with passion and unwavering faith of the working people and their strength.

Nieh Erh lived only twenty-four years. He took part in progressive political activities in his early student days in his native Yunnan Province. In 1933, when he was twenty-two, he joined the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai at the height of the white terror. That same year he started composing. In less than three years, even in the midst of intense revolutionary activity, he managed to write some thirty songs. Fighting and working with the people, he gave voice to their wrath and their demands in music which was typically Chinese and near to their hearts. This was the reason his works so quickly gained wide popularity. Nieh Erh succeeded in making his art serve the people's revolutionary cause. He struck a mighty blow at reactionary and anti-popular tendencies. He blazed the trail for socialist realism in Chinese music.

Hsien Hsing-hai followed in Nieh Erh's footsteps and furthered this cause. He was born in a poor fisherman's family in Kwangtung; he studied music in Paris for about seven years, working his way at odd jobs. When he returned to China in 1935, he plunged into the peo-

ple's revolutionary struggle. His *Song of the Army of National Salvation* expressed the demand that was then in the hearts of all the people: that Chinese guns be pointed at the foreign invader—Japanese militarists—instead of being used for civil war. In 1938, the second year of China's war of resistance to Japanese aggression, Hsien Hsing-hai went to Yenan, China's revolutionary base. There he joined the Communist Party. From then on, he dedicated his passionate, stirring music to describe and support the tense military struggle waged by the people and soldiers of the liberated areas, and to inspire their work as builders and creators. Written at the time when the invaders had been fought to a stalemate, his *Yellow River Cantata* mirrored the spirit and character of the Chinese nation. It depicts the grandeur of China's mountains and rivers. It shows the courage and tenacity of her people in a struggle which they were determined could end only in their victory. This song strengthened the people's pride in their nationhood and their confidence in victory; it showed them a prospect of a truly magnificent future.

When Hsien Hsing-hai returned to China from Paris he was thirty years old. Ten years later he died in Moscow after a long illness. Most of his compositions were crammed into this short decade. His works include nearly five hundred songs, two symphonies, six cantatas, an opera, and dozens of orchestral suites and pieces for solo instruments. Like Nieh Erh, he continued the realist tradition in China's music and further enriched it.

The works of Nieh Erh and Hsien Hsing-hai will forever inspire the people in their forward march. This is especially true today in the new China, of which the two composers could only dream but for which they struggled so valiantly and so well.

Hsien Hsing-hai at work

Colour Wood-Block Reproductions

Jung Pao Chai, famous stationers and printers of Peking, has just concluded an exhibition of their colour wood-block prints and reproductions, in the Art Exhibition Centre of the Union of Chinese Artists by whom it was sponsored jointly with the People's Fine Arts Publishing House.

Over 200 items were on show: New Year pictures, traditional Chinese letter papers with delicately printed designs—mostly flowers and landscapes—forming a background for the letter; scissor-cuts; decorative designs taken from ancient lacquerware and selections from murals of the Tunhuang grottoes, parts of frescoes of figures and scenes as well as pure decorations.

Main interest however centred on the Jung Pao Chai reproductions of works by classical and modern painters in Chinese water colours. Among the most important of the new prints are "Women with Flowers in Their Hair" by Chou Fang of the Tang Dynasty (618-907); a landscape by Chiu Ying of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644); a bird and flower painting by Hua Yen of the Ching Dynasty (1644-1911). The late Hsu Pei-hung was represented by reproductions of some of his splendid horses and hardly less attractive cats. There were reproductions of flower paintings by the well-known contemporary artist Chen Pan-ting and finally a beautiful print of "White Camellias" by Chi Pai-shih, now a veteran of over ninety, as well as an album of his paintings of plants and insects.

Chinese paintings, of course, can be reproduced by ordinary photo-engraving methods from copper plates or collotype, but, since such reproductions have to be printed on papers and with inks different in texture from those used in the originals, all have a "hard" photographic quality and fail to convey the spirit or "feel" of the original. A good Jung Pao Chai reproduction on the other hand is almost indistinguishable from the original. The exhibition, besides showing the phenomenal results of the craftsmanship of the Jung Pao Chai printers, also showed how the work is done. A well arranged stand made clear the whole process: it showed the tracings done for the different colours, the wood-blocks cut to fix the colour areas (sometimes numbering a few dozens); and finally a series of photographs of the printing process itself. This demands the most meticulous care to get the exact tint for each part of the picture and exact coincidence of colours.

This method of reproduction which has a history of several hundred years is admirably suited to the characteristics of Chinese painting. It makes use of the same paper (or silk) and colours used by the original artists. In laying on the colour the printer sometimes puts it on with the same sort of brush and even an exact imitation of the same brush-stroke as the original painter, exactly reproducing either strong, short strokes applied with a half-dry brush or fluid, flowing graduated washes.

All who engaged in this wonderful craft must themselves be artists of a high degree of skill. This is indeed no mechanical process of printing, but a truly creative art.

The Jung Pao Chai is more than sixty years old now. It first made its name as printers of fine letter papers, but it began making colour wood-block reproductions many years ago. Since the liberation the firm has become a state enterprise and has steadily expanded the scale and scope of its activities. With a distinguished panel of advisers, including some of our leading painters and art critics, it is branching out into new fields. Its latest prints are of a size and complexity never before attempted and they have succeeded perfectly.

Frogs By Chi Pai-shih

One of the Chinese ink sketches reproduced in the Jung Pao Chai selection of Chi Pai-shih's work

ARTISTS IN THIS NUMBER

Ku Yuan, who is one of China's best-known woodcut artists, was born in 1919 in the southern province of Kwangtung. In 1940, he joined the Lu Hsun Academy of Art in Yenan. Later, he taught in the Fine Arts Department of the Associated Universities of North China and was on the staff of the "Northeast China Pictorial." He is now a member of the council of the Union of Chinese Artists and director of the art department of the People's Fine Arts Publishing House. A new and enlarged selection of his woodcuts has recently been published in Peking.

Wu Tso-jen, born in 1908, is a native of Anhwei Province. He is a Vice-Chairman of the Union of Chinese Artists, and Dean of the Central Institute of Fine Arts. He is known chiefly as a painter in oils. The portrait of the veteran painter Chi Pai-shih reproduced in this issue is one of his recent works.

Li Tang (c. 1090-1160) gained fame as a painter during the reign of the last emperor of the Northern Sung Dynasty (1119-1126). When the invading Tartars occupied the Sung capital, Kaifeng, he succeeded in escaping south to Hangchow. Here, under the Southern Sung Dynasty which began in 1127, he joined and became one of the leaders of the imperial Academy of Painting.

The painting by Li Tang reproduced opposite page 110 of this issue, is based on an historical incident that took place about 1100 B.C. when the Shang Dynasty was overthrown by that of the Chou. Two brothers Po Yi and Shu Chi, loyal to the Shang, took refuge in the mountains, preferring to eat the wild plants of the mountainside to the food which they might have enjoyed by submission to the new rulers. Contemptuous of the enemy, resolute to the end, they finally perished of starvation in the wilderness. The painter here shows the brothers resting in the mountains after they have gathered a basket of wild vegetables for a meal. One of them is speaking while the other listens with great attention. Bitterness against their enemies and resolution in the face of adversity are expressed in their faces.

The artist could draw on his own experience in painting this picture. He too had lost his home and become a penniless wanderer. He also knew

how to despise unprincipled officials who had sold out to the enemy. Without being melodramatic, the artist has succeeded in conveying his ideas in a painting which truly portrays the bitter anger and staunchness of the patriots of his time.

Chou Chang-ku was born in 1929 in Chekiang Province. In 1953, after completing his training as a painter in the East China branch of the Central Institute of Fine Arts, he continued to work there as a research student in traditional Chinese painting. In 1954 he was commissioned to copy the famous mural paintings in the Tunhuang grottoes.

He painted *Two Lambs* in the Tibetan region of Chinghai Province while on his way to Tunhuang in Northwest China. He received a first prize for it in the art competition at the Fifth World Youth Festival.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

INDIGO FOLK PRINTS OF CHINA

Indigo blue cloth is one of China's most popular and beautiful indigenous products. Cloth, design, dyeing process are all the work of the folk artists themselves. This collection, consisting of 48 coloured plates, is only a mere fraction of the available designs. The themes are all from the everyday life of the people, whether they be familiar animals or flowers, or the famous symbolism of tradition. The titles themselves are attractive—"The Unicorn Brings You a Son," "The Carp Has Leapt Through the Dragon's Gate," or the matter-of-fact "Plum Blossom, Orchid, Pomegranate and Bamboo." Specially reproduced to show both texture and pattern, and with a short preface by a leading expert in the field, the more "difficult"—for the foreign reader—themes have short notes of explanation.

The patterned indigo blue cloth speaks for itself of the simplicity and straightforwardness and inherent love of beauty of the Chinese working people.

CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS FROM CHINA

These paintings, printed in colour, are selected from the 1955 exhibition of children's paintings held in Peking. The young artists, who are from various large cities throughout China, range in age from four to fifteen.

The paintings have vigour and sincerity and reflect the children's reaction to life. They show the great changes that have taken place in New China and express the hopes and ideas of the children.

These drawings do not possess adult technique but have great charm, simplicity and poetic freshness.

(Size: 16mo)

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